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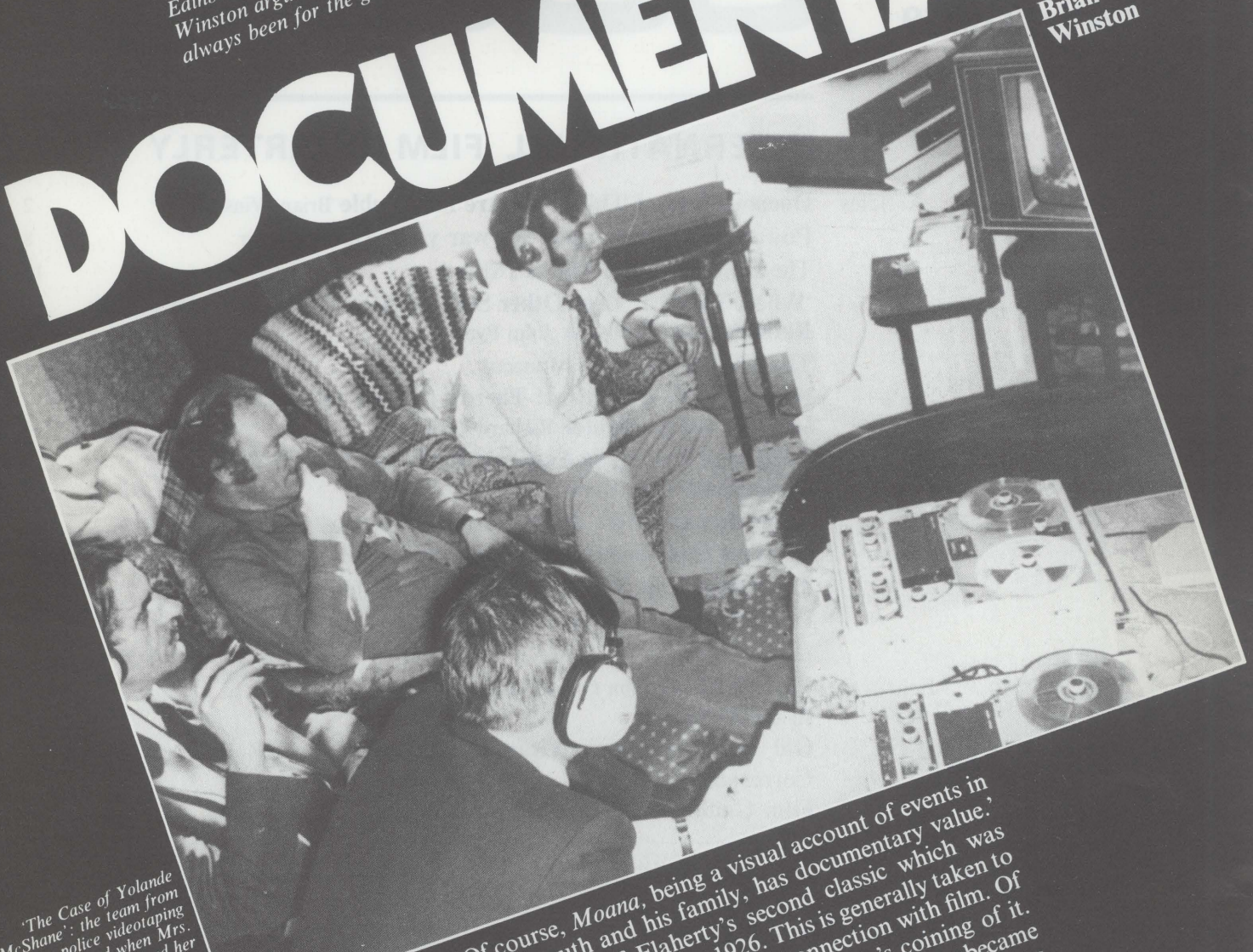
DOCUMENTARY:

Television documentary betrays the influence of cinéma vérité. In this article, which was read as a paper at the Edinburgh Television Festival, Brian Winston argues that the influence has not always been for the good.

Brian Winston



'The Case of Yolande McShane': the team from Sussex police videotaping what happened when Mrs. McShane visited her mother, Mrs. Mott, in an old people's home. Picture copyright of Sussex police.

It all begins with this: 'Of course, *Moana*, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.' Thus wrote Grierson in a review of Flaherty's second classic which was published by the *New York Sun* on 8 February 1926. This is generally taken to be the first time the word 'documentary' was used in connection with film. Of course, what we understand by that term precedes Grierson's coining of it. The cinema began with documentary material, but audiences rapidly became bored with babies eating breakfast, trains arriving at stations and workers leaving factories. Audiences in the 1890s required of the new medium what they expected of older media—stories, narratives with beginnings, middles, climaxes, denouements and ends. And it was the fiction film that was to provide for this age-old want. Only when Flaherty began to structure his actuality material so that it too might satisfy those needs could Grierson and others detect a new form and name it 'documentary'. But the need for structure implicitly contradicts the notion of unstructured actuality. The idea of documentary, then and now, is sustained by simply ignoring this contradiction. Paul Rotha therefore could sum it up thus: 'Documentary's essence lies in the dramatisation of actual material.'

I THINK WE ARE IN TROUBLE

For over half a century we have been happy to accept this. But of late a growing sophistication has begun to question the very basis on which the idea of documentary rests. Given the need to decide for a camera to be present; the deals that must be done with those that are to be filmed; the effect of the camera's presence; the decision when to film and when not; how to light, what lens to use and where to stand; where to position microphones—one can legitimately begin to query what is 'actual' in Rotha's 'actual material'. And then the crucial work of moulding the film into a culturally satisfying shape—the need to ignore the sequence of rushes, to cross-cut, to build climaxes, to remove or add sound, to add commentary and music, titles—raises further questions as to how much of the 'actual' can be left when the process of 'dramatisation' is complete.

These doubts are not obscure academic ones without relevance to the film-maker and his or her audience. On the basis of Grierson's notion of a separate form we have established a hierarchy of truth in film whereby documentary (in its narrow sense, but also current affairs and news) stands higher than fiction. If it is the case that that hierarchy is built on shifting sand, then the legitimacy of whole areas of work crumbles; and, further, the moral and ethical problems facing the film-maker are dramatically increased.

□

By the late 40s the crude idea of separating documentary from fiction had received many knocks. From the very beginning film-makers had been quizzed about their working methods. Was it right to get Nanook freezing inside his roofless igloo so that the interior could be naturally lit? Did Aran men still fish for shark? But, more importantly, the strain of adapting a studio-based technology for the very different work of documentary filming had led to regular reconstruction practices. Thus real mail sorters sort mail in a faked rail coach in a studio because the technology would not allow *Night Mail* to be made *in situ*. Harry Watt recalls that 'we couldn't afford what they have in feature films—that is a rocker set . . . so all we could do was to move by hand, out of picture, certain things like balls of string hanging down, make them sway regularly to give the impression of the train moving, and get the chaps to sway a little bit.'

Since the exotic subject matter of early documentaries (Persian nomads, Eskimos, Polynesians and the rest) had given way to a quite conscious political desire to document the film-makers' own societies, subjects like *Night Mail* were constantly requiring fiction film solutions. By 1948 the notion of 'actual material' had to be drastically refined. A definition of documentary film of that year states that it is 'all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture and human relations.' *Brief Encounter*, anybody?

What has happened here in effect is that since documentaries required the same technology as features, the resultant confusion could only be unscrambled by calling the purpose of the film-makers and the responses of audiences into the balance. It had become less a question of how and what things appeared on the screen but rather why they were there. 'The line between the documentary and the fiction film is tenuous indeed.

'Decision: British Communism': Roger Graef's camera team filming a meeting during the Communist Party Congress, for Granada's documentary

Both are artefacts; both are contrivances. Both are created by editing and selection. Both, wittingly or not, embody a viewpoint. The fact that one eschews and the other employs professional actors becomes in the end an economic detail.' (Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.) And not even this last little distinction can be allowed to stand. Kurosawa made a documentary about women workers in an optical factory during the war, *The Most Beautiful,* in which actresses played the workers—but he did not allow them to wear make-up.

For some the solution to the problem of rediscovering the roots of documentary lay in advancing the technology. Leacock, who had been Flaherty's cameraman on *Louisiana Story,* struggled through the 50s to create a portable 16mm sync sound outfit based on the widely used Auricon. Parallel to this, in France the brilliant designer Coutant was developing the first custom-built hand-holdable self-blimped camera. At the same time battery-driven tape recorders were developing to the point at which they would render professionally acceptable sound and did not require four people to carry them; and film stocks were not only growing in sensitivity but their tolerance for being forced in development increased also. Thus by 1960 the technology was at hand to break out of the bind created by using feature film equipment to make documentaries. Leacock was able to ask, for the first time, that the events being filmed remained more important than the requirements of the film-makers. It was possible, at last, to 'observe' without elaborate previously agreed arrangements, without directions, without lights.

The acceptance of this technology into the mainstream of broadcast television is something many of us will remember vividly. I can recall seeing in the 'World in Action' offices in 1963 *Jane,* a film made by Pennebaker in New York the previous year. It had been shot on Ilford and forced to 1000 ASA, facts which were simply denied by representatives of the manufacturing company and the labs when we asked them to duplicate the work here. It was an era when cameramen demanded whether you wanted something shot 'properly' or in 'wobblyscope' and sound recordists audibly queried the acceptability of mumbles. But this happy season soon passed and technicians mastered the new machines. Vérité here became one style of shooting among many, but this was not the case in the States and France.

Those who had pushed for the gear erected around it a philosophy of documentary purity. In America this meant direct cinema. The film-makers were to keep their contacts with the subject to an absolute minimum; to be as self-effacing as possible; never, but never, to ask anybody to do anything for the camera. And the final films were to adhere as closely as possible to the actual order of events as filmed; takes were long and jump cuts were a sign of virile truth in the editing; and, almost above all, there was no commentary, no third voice imposing a frame between subjects and audience. Needless to say, interviews were also *verboten*; ironically, as Colin Young points out, it was 'about that same time Jean-Luc Godard started using "interviews" in his fiction.' With the fervour of true believers, the direct cinema group cast scorn and derision on all who made films purporting to be documentaries in any other way but theirs. The grail had been found—'actual material' as mined from life, fresh and vivid before your very eyes. Yet the need for 'dramatisation', rooted as it was in millenia of storytelling, had not gone away.

It was a pity that because of our shared language we should have taken cognisance of the Americans before we got round to absorbing the French use of the new technology. For there in the work of Chris Marker, and more particularly in that of the anthropologist Jean Rouch, the nature of the new grail was being more directly questioned. In retrospect, it seems to me that the crucial film in all this is *Chronique d'un Eté*, made by Rouch and Edgar Morin, a sociologist, in the summer of 1960. Perhaps because of their more strict academic backgrounds they were more aware of the intrinsic difficulties of observation than the Americans. They understood better the effect of the observer on the observed, and obeying their own notions of what 'truths' were possible in the film-making process they resolved that honesty demanded they be visible in the final film.

Chronique is partly about 'the strange tribe that lives in Paris', a reaction by Rouch to radical criticism of the anthropologists' role in cultures other than their own. But more than that it is a film which directly confronts the difficulty of preserving 'the actual', even with the new equipment. At the start Morin and Rouch talk on camera about trying to get 'a type of cinéma vérité'—the first time, as far as I am aware, the phrase was recorded. The film's climax, like most of its sequences, is manipulated—created by the film-makers. They have invited all the participants to see a rough cut. (This courtesy, by the way, being no part of direct cinema practice.) The reactions to the cut are then filmed, and the coda consists of Morin and Rouch pacing the halls of the Musée de l'Homme discussing vexed questions as to whether it was right to probe one participant's emotional crisis, or whether another's recall of wartime deportation was real or dramatised for the camera. At the door of the museum Rouch asks Morin what he thinks. He replies: 'I think we are in trouble.' The film ends.

It is my contention that Morin was right. We have been in trouble ever since. The new technology did not solve the problems of documentary; rather, it pushed them back to basics. The validity of the documentary idea and the difficulties of making documentaries were not in essence to do with reconstruction. The new technology removed that as a problem for the better part of fifteen years. But the technology did not touch the moral and ethical difficulties of the film-maker. If anything, the ease with which he or she could penetrate other peoples' lives increased these problems. And it did not tackle the basic need for all messages to be structured in obedience to cultural codes—to tell stories. Substantially, direct cinema and cinéma vérité were made and can be evaluated like any other documentaries. They did not create a new code.

For Rouch and Morin the only possible vérité was one which included the film-maker—as if it were the case that the only subject for documentary film was the making of documentary film. Although this is a *reductio ad absurdum,* since film's ability to record events and to bring witness to bear must count for something, nevertheless it is a healthier and more honest absurdity than some others. The notion that, for instance, film crews can be like 'flies on the wall', which is very much what vérité has come to mean in Britain, is just as much nonsense.

Thus in various ways in various countries the new technology allowed rhetorics to be created which sustained the idea of the documentary. So it is still the case that documentary 'seems an honest weather-beaten word, conveying the feeling that here, at last, there is no nonsense, no faking, only plain facts.' (Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.) The film-maker is caught by the public acceptance of the notion of documentary, institutionalised in discrete broadcasting departments, separate union agreements and the rest. The 'crisis', if there is one, has to do with this dilemma. Having established that some films contain a greater degree of a particular sort of truth than others, and having done so on pretty tenuous grounds, can any valid basis for such work now be drawn?

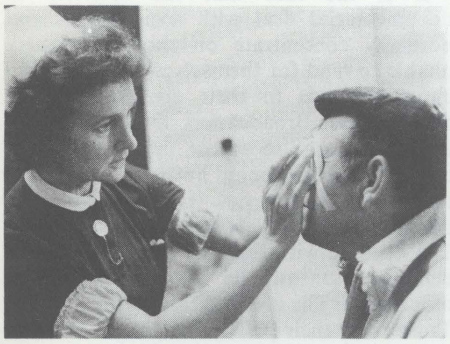
□

In Britain, vérité has become simply a question of long hand-held takes, actuality sound and a certain looseness with the rules of continuity cutting. As such it has joined the whole panoply of techniques which pre-existed its introduction—commentary, interviews, graphics, reconstruction and the rest. But it has caused damage to all of these. Film-makers are now too often sloppy about construction. Unless the form is dictated in terms of a specific time span, the average weekly television documentary frequently leaps from area to area of its subject matter like a startled fawn. The commentary relies on tired and well worked (it's-a-long-way-from-this-to-this) links to hold the whole together. The need to mould long vérité takes is not in my view a prime cause of this. Rather the new technology as a whole has meant a revolution in the way any documentary is made. People do not write documentaries as they used to—like features. Research can often now become simply a question of doing the deal to get inside whatever door needs to be got inside. The rhetoric of direct cinema is used to limit the manipulation once thought necessary to make a coherent and dramatic (with the littlest possible 'd') statement. The result is that structure goes out of the window and much work is confused and ill-thought out. When a documentarist of, say, David Attenborough's experience and standing can make a straightforward look at the London Zoo a shambles, some old-fashioned standards have clearly been lost. And the wonders of vérité have offered little to compensate for this loss of rigour.

Direct cinema has, at its best, never fallen into this trap. Wiseman's *Hospital,* for instance, reveals that the standards of story-telling have not changed. The film is structured around sequences of normal, emotionally uncharged activities cross-cut with sequences of distress whereby the former become shorter and the latter longer and more distressful as the film progresses. It is all about as loose and untouched by human film editor as the average Hitchcock. It takes place within a clearly defined cultural frame. It starts with hospital personnel starting an operation. It finishes with them finishing an operation—the patient is dead. And its coda is an old man being turned away, walking down a corridor like a sunsetless Chaplin.

In British terms, when vérité is being used more or less (actually, normally less) as the direct cinema intended it to be, as in Tim King's *Casualty* in the *Hospital* series or in Angela Pope's *Best Days?*, there is a similar attention to structure. *Best Days?* starts with assembly and finishes with the school cleaners. *Casualty* obeys a strict time pattern constantly reinforced in shots and commentary. But much other work lacks the rigour of the great documentary tradition because filmmakers have allowed themselves to be duped by the seeming randomness of much direct cinema.

In films which mix techniques, and that is the vast majority, there is an even greater hazard to be faced in the use of bits of vérité. Take, for instance, although many more examples are readily available, James Cameron's report on Israel or the *Inside Story* on the British troops in Belize. It is the excuse, if you will, of the easily captured episode which either loosens or destroys the overall shape of the film. In *Inside Story* a soldier is briefly interviewed on the non-availability of basic materials and is then



'Casualty' in BBC-2's 'Hospital' series

observed failing to find in the general store the putty he needs. Such a sequence, coming as it does in the midst of a clever commentary—and in a film that is leaping around Belize from base to base, activity to activity—adds only to the hotchpotch. Happenstance is used to cover what could otherwise be a real element in the story. The army's difficulties with material, with provisions, with entertainment are all treated with different techniques, which are seemingly more or less randomly linked. Cameron uses the accident of a group of oriental women's bus breaking down to say all that he has to say about the position of oriental Jews in Israel. Around such happenstance too many current documentaries fall apart, literally, at the seams.

Happenstance remains a problem even when vérité is being used more consistently in a film. Vérité in essence invites us, the audience, to consider material as evidence. The 'fly on the wall' rhetoric increases this. At its most extreme it's the tape released by the police for *The Case of Yolande McShane*. (Although John Willis used mixed techniques and a well constructed form, it is the video element that here concerns us primarily.) The tape, which was obtained by a video camera literally embedded fly-like on the wall, was presented both in court and on television as evidence. But it was quite clearly therefore evidence of just one particular event, a meeting between Mrs. McShane and her mother. In this it differed from most vérité shooting, which claims to stand not only as specifics but also as examples of general cases. This is true of *Best Days?* and *Casualty*, and as a result the impression that we are spending just one day in the school (or indeed are actually at all times in the school), or the impression that events are happening simultaneously because of cross-cutting between different areas in the ward, renders the material that much more suspect. Happenstance starts to play too large a part. The fly begins to acquire editorial skills.

Obviously this would be all right if the rhetoric surrounding such programmes were different, but it isn't. And it's the rhetoric as often as not that brings down the wrath of participants and others, not the programme material itself. If you introduce something as 'a fly on the wall view' of a subject, and *Best Days?* was so introduced by David Dimbleby, then even if you are Caesar's wife in terms of obtaining the material, you are still likely to be in trouble.

□

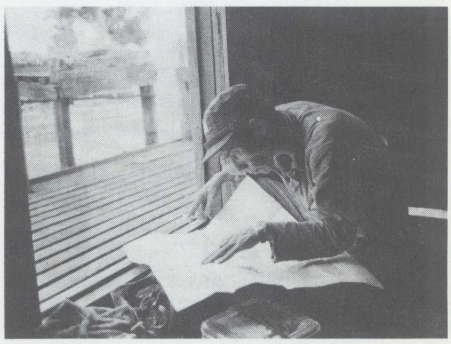
I do not want to give the impression that all these problems are simply the result of vérité. Most have been caused or at least exacerbated by the introduction of lightweight equipment, but some have nothing to do with it. Take for instance what might be called hidden reconstruction. This is far too common in investigative and general work. Although whole programmes or sequences within programmes are now commonly identified as being reconstructions, this does not apply to the single shot (as when Mrs. McShane's brother-in-law is seen entering a police station clutching a letter which he actually, one gathers from the commentary, clutched on some previous occasion). Nor does it prevent more general ambiguities, as when, in the first *South African Experience*, the school board is shown sitting today discussing God knows what while, in the commentary, Anthony Thomas explains what they, the very same men, had discussed and decided many years before.

It is possible to avoid many of these problems altogether and simply take testimony, as in *Jimmy*. At least we immediately know where we are. There is no pretence that the event would have existed were it not for the camera. This leaves us, as audience, with the problem of evaluating the testimony we are given. Did Jimmy go 'Paki-bashing'? At that point in the interview it becomes difficult to know whether Jimmy's admission is true or bravado. The audience becomes jury but it can, however partially, also assess Michael Whyte's performance as a cross-examiner. With vérité this all becomes more vexed.

I watch the unfolding educational disaster of the comprehensive school in *Best Days?* and I am utterly unprepared for the sudden conversation with the university applicants. Nothing in the film up to that point suggests that in such an atmosphere any child can be prepared for university. I begin to assume that the fly is a fully paid up member of the Headmasters' Conference. It could be argued that this is simply because the film has failed to convince as evidence. But even when that claim can be better made, as, say, with *Decisions: Steel*, the waterfront is still quite clearly not fully covered. Yet it is significant that the row following that transmission was about actual managerial processes, not about whether the film had recorded those processes in a fraudulent or incomplete way. Roger Graef has the advantage of an expanded time slot and is prepared to bore the pants off us to make sure we know what goes on, yet he will not acknowledge the limitations of treating observation as fact. Just because he frequently hides under the table or out in the corridor while shooting does not mean he is not there.

On all these grounds it becomes easiest to cope with personalised statements, like James Cameron on Israel or Anthony Thomas in *The South African Experience*. This willingness to reveal where one is coming from was the distinguishing mark of much of Robert Vas' work. It can be seen too in the best work of journalists like Michael Cockerell and Tom Mangold. And if one can add—as Adrian Cowell did with his careful description of how *Opium Warlords* was actually shot—a reminder of some sort of the film-making process, so much the better.

The basic inheritance of vérité shooting is that instead of acknowledging the actual processes of film-making (as in the cinéma vérité model) and the implicit selection and editorialising that filming implies at every



Adrian Cowell's 'The Opium Warlords'

stage, elaborate claims are made by film-makers to take upon themselves the emotional capacity and the brain of the members of the order *Diptera*.

Legitimatisation of material does not depend on clearly marking programmes as documentary. It does not depend, in fact, on any easy solutions. The old techniques are as valuable as the new if a proper basis for their use can be established. There is no particular virtue in adopting the rhetoric of the strictest proponents of direct cinema. They still manipulate and editorialise. There is no guarantee of some species of realer truth in jump cutting or going to black. (But one thing they did understand; the method, whether as pure as man can make it or as debased as television often requires it, is not suited to all subjects. It needs concreteness and, preferably, almost Greek unities of time and space. It cannot cope too well with grand abstractions.) Equally there are no advantages in coming clean about provenance or reconstructions. All these are technological or stylistic devices. Of themselves they are neither good nor bad, although they can irritate or confuse. The real issue remains outside of technological solutions. It has to do, as it has from the beginning, not with questions of form but rather with issues of purpose.

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Narrativity is but one aspect of the need to obey deep-seated cultural norms. Stories must be told, but about what? Dana's adage

Gamekeeper Harry Churchill in Richard Broad's 'The Shoot'

about news applies equally well to documentary. Dogs biting men might seem as appropriate, at first sight, to the documentary film-maker as men biting dogs. But in effect the demands of narrativity and the concomitant expectations of the audience turn all dog bites round. Because of the nature of television, to film a dog biting a man makes it just as deviant an event when screened as man biting dog.

The proof of this can be found in ethnographic work. At its best, at its most observationally pure, only an anthropologist could love it. The uncut distant observation of quotidian activity or special ritual requires professional training on the part of the audience. For a general unspecialised group it is repetitive, boring and incomprehensible. And anyway most anthropologists are as given to structuring their work according to the narrative norms of their own societies as the rest of us. The result is that film has never yielded its promise as an anthropological tool and it never will. If anything, they are even more hypersensitive about happenstance, selection, lens and so on. Show them an interminable take of a man in long shot hoeing and they will complain about the degree of manipulation involved in starting and stopping the camera!*

So it is that *Disappearing World,* apart from looking like very good films to the rest of us, can also win approval from the Royal Anthropological Society. They cannot create an alternative code, so they might as well use the one we all obey. Ethnographic concerns inform many films made about our own society but few are as rigorous as Richard Broad's undeservedly unremarked film, *The Shoot*, about an English gamekeeper's year. And here, as usual, its value as evidence was vitiated by its excellence as film. An exquisite shot of the landscape into which the gamekeeper hero exquisitely places himself, followed by a matched cut to a close-up of the trap he is inspecting, speaks too clearly of a skilled and mannered director at his most elegant. But ethnographic it isn't. Or rather it is as ethnographic as the average Millais. In other words, hanging around looking at things yields rushes. Moulding the rushes into films renders the material suspect as evidence and turns all behaviour, most of which is normally unfilmed, into deviant behaviour if only by reason of the filming.

Most documentaries have little overt ethnographic purpose. Even the currently fashionable documentary series, concentrating as they do on the world of work, deal in some measure with deviancy. It is the pilot who has never landed on the aircraft carrier before (*The Squadrons are Coming* in the *Sailor* series), the doctors who do not know what they are doing (*Casualty* in the *Hospital* series) that adds the *frisson* we expect from the screen. And as for the one-offs, it is *60 Seconds of Hatred,* the lifeboat man who did not get on the boat, the juvenile delinquent, the homeless. It is man bites dog—in a word, deviancy.

It is probably fair to suggest that more than Dennis Potter and Philip Purser are increasingly disturbed by and distrustful of this seemingly endless parade of the halt and the blind, the deranged and the dispossessed on our screens. The justification for this work depends on twin pillars. One is that the film contains a more or less truthful account of the subject (which, as I have indicated above, is open to not a few questions). The other is contained in a hotchpotch of ideas involving notions of the public's right to know, the rhetoric of the fourth estate etc., which together add up to a hallowed element in the liberal philosophy of the state. It should, however, not be forgotten that this corpus of ideas emerged in the very different circumstances of two centuries ago, and related to the very different situation of the media then.

Of course, there is no difficulty about the public's right to know, however much more honoured in the breach than the observance it might often seem to be. But essentially it is not (and never has been) the public's right to know which is at issue. It is rather which members of the public have the right to tell—to publish. Liebling once remarked, 'Anybody in the ten-million-dollar category is free to buy or found a paper in a great city like New York or Chicago, and anybody with around a million (plus a lot of sporting blood) is free to try it in a place of mediocre size like Worcester, Mass.' This is just as true of broadcasting; truer in fact because of the government's regulation of the airwaves. The limits on publication rights require considerable circumspection on the part of broadcasters. The care needed becomes all the more important. It certainly cannot be discharged by relying on half-understood 19th century platitudes when the going gets tough. And it becomes even more tricky as long as the documentarist and the broadcasting executive view deviancy of all kinds as instant subject matter.

It is the case that the majority of documentaries deal with social issues and normally concentrate on those in society unable to fend for themselves. This inability clearly extends to their dealing with the broadcasters. Broadcasters therefore owe a duty of care to those without whose co-operation they could not work. Too often that care is, in my view, not being properly discharged. Take *Goodbye Longfellow Road.* The opening with the bailiffs was a salutary demonstration of the casual brutality of officialdom. The investigation of the Housing Trusts, and their perhaps improper relations with some local government officials, was equally justifiable in simple terms of the public's right to know. But what about the film's heart? What is the moral position of a crew stalking a woman day after day as she searches for a roof and eventually filming her being rushed into hospital, diseased by her living conditions? To suggest that they intervene (more than their presence already does) reminds one of Buñuel. When Viridiana stops her car so that she can untie an exhausted dog from the axle of a cart, behind her back as she works, and unseen by her, another equally exhausted dog is being pulled by another cart in the opposite direction. It is not the function of film crews to act as an entirely haphazard and arbitrary long stop to the social support systems. Yet equally their use of others' experience to create spectacle, however edifying, does not (or certainly should not in common human terms) leave them untouched.

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Edifying is the crucial word here. For the public's right to know implies an assumption about the nature of the audience response. This seems to suggest that if the audience is shown a situation, then public awareness will move to correct it in some way. Even if this were demonstrably the case, which it demonstrably is not, it would still be difficult to justify it in terms of television's mass audience. And the superficiality of much documentary work, encouraged by the vérité style, makes it difficult to see how the information given could achieve opinion-changing effects.

* This occurred at a recent meeting in Australia of anthropologists, who had watched such a scene in a Rouch film.

Most films lack almost any meaningful analysis of cause. This is a part of the great British documentary tradition and it has been there from the very start. Of *Drifters* a particularly perceptive contemporary critic wrote: 'Remember the contempt Grierson actually had for the marketing of the fish, the regret he seemed to express that the fish, the fruit of the glorious adventure, was bought and sold for money . . . Grierson dealt with actual industry or occupation but ran away from its social meaning.' It can be said that similar inhibitions seem to be built into the agenda for most social documentaries. This seems to be more true of domestic than foreign subjects (*Hong Kong Beat* being a dishonourable exception). Thus Anthony Thomas' examination of Sandra's case in the first *South African Experience* offers a far more coherent attempt to explain the society in which the film is set than do most British counterparts—*Jimmy*, for example. But even Thomas, admittedly under considerable and quite improper pressure from certain quarters, becomes far less clear in his economic analysis of British interests in South Africa in the last of the series.

It is in this sense that films are superficial. The unwillingness to tackle cause certainly contributes to the acceptability of many seemingly contentious social issues as subject matter. The worst that can happen to the system is that the audience will dip into its pocket and fund Shelter. (And it is more interesting to note that *Cathy Come Home* was committed, rather than that it was a drama documentary.) So I am denying that the television audience's right to know is an automatic justification for the pursuit of social deviancy as subject matter. For after all, is it the UK transmission of World in Action's *Year of the Torturer* that has effect, or is it special screenings for the European Council of Ministers?

This is perhaps more clearly seen when one turns from victim documentaries (like *Goodbye Longfellow Road*) to other aspects of deviancy juicier by far than homelessness. Take the murderers. A public right to know was the implicit justification of *60 Seconds of Hatred*. It was made explicit by the police chief at the end of *The Case of Yolande McShane*. In these programmes it is difficult to see what is edifying, or even how public opinion affects the issues one way or the other.

The policeman argued that the McShane case was an example of hidden crime and showing it would deter. But I would have thought that there was an equal chance many more of us might have got the idea that bumping off a wealthy senile relative was a piece of cake. It is no longer possible for broadcasters to hide in ignorance of the case on violence, relying on ill thought out liberal attitudes on the effects of television. There is a case (and many think it now overwhelming) that for the badly socialised all classes of television messages can be misused—if not as models then more possibly as triggers.

The fact that both these films (thundering good tales, very well told) were good examples of craft deepens the problem. The music sequences in *60 Seconds of Hatred* might well have offered clues as to the murderer's mental attitude. But to do so in such an impressionistic way must move the film from edifying to prurient. And why was so much of the police tape used in *The Case of Yolande McShane*? Was the nuns' search of the mother necessary to the police officers' and the programme-makers' justification? Or was it not, rather, simply degrading to the old woman? And would the facts of Mrs. McShane's wartime illegitimate baby or even her support of Mosley in the period before that have been admissible evidence in a court of law? (And even if they were, why should they be repeated in a story of attempted matricide?) That the police have mastered video technology should be generally known. But the film was not, in truth, really about that.

In these programmes we are getting close to the *News of the World*—only here I see nobody making their apologies and leaving. We are smack in the middle of the *News of the World* with *Chance of a Lifetime—Lifeboat*. Here in long shot, with radio mikes (carefully?) hidden, the man who alone survived the storm of forty years before meets and talks to the man who that night decades ago decided not to go. It was the first time they had spoken to each other since. In a previous interview in the film, one of them was asked who was to make the first move. I would not presume to suggest which of them it ought to have been. But of one thing I am absolutely certain—it should not have been YTV, a wholly owned subsidiary of Trident Television. Where in this rank invasion of privacy can be found any vestige of a public right to know?

It is significant that the people one worries for, the people whose hopelessness or guilt is paraded before us, are all less able to defend themselves than those, more powerful, whose rights are more quickly protected. When *The London Programme* has audio tapes of a senior police officer's wife talking to the wife of his chief suspect in quite improper terms, suddenly the IBA is very concerned about the former's privacy. But for Mrs. McShane's mum, Jimmy, the Cornish seamen, there seems to be nae bother.

It would be as well if we started to distinguish between an individual's public and private personae, a feat not unimaginable in English law. People discharging official functions (as in all Roger Graef's work) have a public persona when they are so acting. Other behaviour, whether deviant or not, in such people attaches to their private persona. Others might well have almost no public persona except, say, when they are progressing through public places. If this were made clear, then the film-makers would better know where they are. The public persona would be susceptible to coverage which could then easily be justified in terms of the public's right to know. In fact, in the interest of freedom of information the public persona should be a lot more susceptible to such coverage than it often is now. But the private persona should attract a clear, limiting and binding duty of care from the film-maker.

'Victim documentary': 'Goodbye Longfellow Road'

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I have tried to make the following points: documentary has so much in common with fiction that stressing its differences is not only difficult but cannot legitimatise it. The impact of the vérité style has resulted in a lessening of the rigour with which films are put together. It has increased the *ad hoc* element in filming. The constant examination of social problems in a highly personalised and intrusive way (as made possible by the vérité style) cannot be justified by the public's right to know. There should be a distinction between public and private personae; and, when dealing with the latter, the film-maker should have an absolute duty of care to protect the subject, even if necessary from themselves. The release form may be sufficient in law at present, but it will not do for ethics.

Above all, perhaps one should stress that the film-makers in this area are the victims of a rhetoric about documentary which they have but inherited but which both on and off the screens they are not at sufficient pains to disown. In this light, the row about drama documentaries should be seen for what it is—a row about how material is presented, not about what the material presents. For the fact that somewhere on Iona Isle lies buried Macbeth becomes important to *Macbeth* only if the Globe management were to have claimed that all the events the audience were to witness were based on an eye-witness account smuggled out of the castle on bits of parchment by the old man Ross meets in Act 2 Scene 4.

And it is this problem of presentation in documentaries generally that raises most of these issues. Our ability to reason out codes of practice which would allow us properly to discharge a sophisticated and workable notion of documentary in this society is constantly befouled by our unwillingness to tackle the basic issue. Documentaries are constructed artefacts. We know that when we look at the titles of *Hong Kong Beat* or *Sailor*. We know it when we come to heap praise or blame on those who make them. But for all other purposes we seem as able as ever to ignore it. To continue to do so 'would not be a good plan'. ■

Brian Winston's paper was first published in the Edinburgh Television Festival brochure produced by Broadcast. *(Available from 111A Wardour Street, London W1V 3TD, price £3.00.)*

The occasion of the National Film Theatre's thorough, 38-film tribute to Powell and Pressburger (during October/November of last year) was clearly an unparalleled opportunity to interview the now 73-year-old Mr. Powell. The concurrently released newspaper story revealing Churchill's determined efforts to suppress *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* was a demonstrative reminder that the war years were a key era in the development of British film-making. As a bonus, concentration on this relatively brief period of a lengthy career could give the interview a natural and concise shape. In the event, what emerges most strikingly is a spirit-stirring account of hectic and impetuous film-making activity. In the circumstances, one is amazed that Powell and his team of talented collaborators were able to find time to draw breath: eight films (and a couple of shorts), each one in some way a significant advance on the last, in the space of six very crowded years, is an astonishing achievement in itself. But when one grasps that all these films except *The Lion Has Wings* were originals, conceived and written by Powell and Pressburger themselves, their achievement reaches mind-boggling proportions.

Perhaps inevitably, the final interview concentrates on the physical act of film-making rather than the artistic preoccupations of the film-makers. This is partly because the emergence of a cinema of real force (and here one must include Thorold Dickinson, David Lean, Carol Reed, Launder and Gilliat *et al.*) amid the ashes of war-torn Britain is a feat that has never really been sufficiently acknowledged; and partly because Powell rightly believes that his films speak for him when it comes to themes and meanings. The hints and clues are there but, as with the films themselves, you have to look beneath the surface to discover them.

What was particularly cheering about the NFT's season was that films like *Colonel Blimp* and *A Canterbury Tale*—rarely seen at all since their premieres and only now in their original form—are at last receiving their proper recognition as fine works by anybody's standards. Allusive, intense, irrepressibly romantic, unabashedly patriotic, uninhibitedly expressionist, witty and adroit, superbly shot in a forceful and exciting visual style and, above all, tinged with a fascination for the unusual and the unknowable that makes them uniquely disquieting, these are films to be seen and savoured over and over again.

POWELL THE

Michael Powell

The real start of British films in my opinion came with the war, and this began with an undertaking by Alexander Korda, who was very friendly with Churchill. In fact, in the lean years before the war he had employed Churchill as a writer. As he had built this enormous studio at Denham and had the most complex production set-up in Europe, Korda promised Churchill that if war broke out in 1939 he would turn the whole of his technical staff, his contract actors and directors and everybody he could lay his hands on, into making a propaganda film. This was *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

Most of us at that time were working against time to try to finish *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940); that's why there are so many directors on the film. Actually, I started the film but Ludwig Berger had done a lot of very good tests; I saw them, they're excellent. Then Alex got in Tim Whelan . . . Zoltan Korda did one or two things, Alex directed one or two things . . . and we were all rushing about from one end of this vast lot to the other. I had a number of very big sets under my general control and I was preparing all this mostly with Sabu and Conrad Veidt. I'm not sure whether we had any warning; all I remember is that we were working over the weekend to try to finish *Thief* when war was declared.

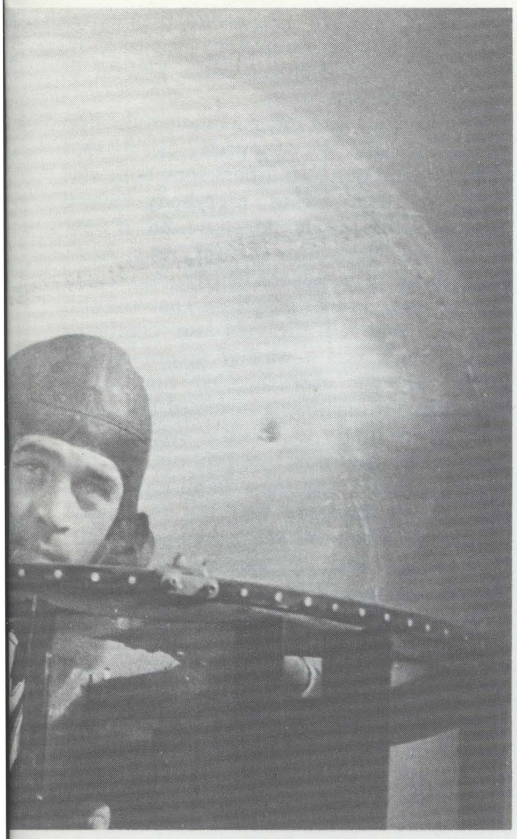
We all gathered in the coal bunker—which fortunately was empty of coal and seemed the safest place because everybody was expecting an air raid at once—to hear Alex tell us what his plan was. Most of us were going to drop off *Thief* and go straight into a film which he'd already decided with Churchill was to be called *The Lion Has Wings*. I'd already been asked to consult with Ian Dalrymple, who had been chief editor at Gaumont and then a producer with Victor Saville. An extremely able and very nice man and a wonderful organiser, he had been put in charge of the whole production. We had a talk and I decided to do all the combat stuff with fighter aircraft and most of the stuff dealing with the defence of England, the radar system and all that sort of thing—about none of which I knew anything.

A bright, young R.A.F. Liaison officer was appointed to me called Squadron Leader Wright. He met me on the Sunday and we made an appointment for the Monday to meet at Denham golf course, where he was going to land with a small aircraft, and we would fly over the balloon barrage to a big airfield in Norfolk. I started shooting on that same day. As it happened we didn't land at a fighter station but a bomber station, where I was lucky enough to get them bombing up and preparing for the first raid on Kiel. After that Wright and I cast around various aerodromes getting material, ending up at Hornchurch on a fighter station. I knew a few people in the R.A.F. High Command so I was able to appeal to them if we got arrested—which we frequently did. After that we moved into the studio. The whole of *The Lion Has Wings* was hurled into production, completed and on the screen within a month. That was due to Korda's tremendous energy behind everything and the amazing organisation of Ian Dalrymple and his team of editors.

Well, that convinced Churchill—and other people who had to be convinced because at that time Churchill wasn't Prime Minister, you'll remember—that the British film industry should somehow be kept going. That was very important, because if something like that hadn't happened right away it might have vanished as it did in the 1914 war. I mean, all the Americans quite naturally got the hell out and went back to America, and we were left without a leader unless we wanted to lead ourselves. We needed this stimulus of the Government saying the film industry must go on. As soon as they said that, Emeric Pressburger and I, who had done *The Spy in Black* (1939) together, said to Conrad Veidt, 'We are going to write, not exactly a sequel, but a similar type of film for you and Valerie Hobson, because we had a big success and we can get the money if we immediately make another one.'

We went straight to British National Films, which was owned by Lady Yule and managed by John Corfield, and they backed us to do *Contraband* (1940). Already in November 1939 we were down at Ramsgate shooting in the Contraband Control and out amongst the ships in the harbour. Alfred Junge, the great German art director, worked with us on that film. He had been head of all art direction for Gaumont British—all their art directors were trained by him. And during *The Thief of Bagdad* we worked out several sequences together—a case of mutual respect. I knew he was the best man in the world so I hurled him into *Contraband* immediately.

So that kept us and the British film industry going over that sticky period around January, 1940. About February, John Sutro, who was a great friend of Korda's and one of



Left: 'The Lion Has Wings': pilot embarking for the Kiel raid. Right: 'A Matter of Life and Death': David Niven on the beach after the bomber crashes

and PRESSBURGER: WAR YEARS

David Badder

his directors on the board, came to me and said the Government definitely wants to back films, they will even put Government money into it if we can't raise the money elsewhere. I went with him to see Kenneth Clark, who had been appointed Head of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information. This was the first smell of any organisation to do with films, and since Kenneth Clark was Director of the National Gallery and presumably knew about pictures he was put in charge of the films division. Fortunately, it was a good appointment because Kenneth is a very knowledgeable man and loved films, so he was very sensible. Only he was doing what he'd been told by, I suppose, propagandists, because the first thing he said to me was, 'Would you like to make a film about mine sweeping?' I said, 'No, I wouldn't, the first thing they did in the last war was make a film about mine sweeping, and this is a new war. I want to go to Canada and make a film there.'

I was quite clear about it; the reason was that I'd read a feature article a few weeks before by Beverley Baxter, a Canadian journalist very popular in London. It was about the fact that Canada had come into the war in spite of French Canadian resistance, and how eventually the influence of Canada would bring America into the war. He didn't absolutely say so but he hinted it. And so I said the same to Clark and, 'I'd like to gather together three or four people in whom I have confidence and we'll go over there and do the research.' He asked what the story would be and I said, 'How can we tell until we go? You send us and we'll come back with a story.' And because we'd had successes with original stories and, I suppose, because I was full of drive, they put up £5,000 and in a week or two we were off. This was really the start of the MOI actually moving into feature films: they had approved the idea of making a film in Canada, the rest of the complications they left to us.

Emeric thought of the idea—the crew of a sunken German U-boat stranded in Canada—of *49th Parallel* (1941) about two days out on the boat. When we got to Halifax, we went straight to Ottawa. In those days, and even now, you can call a Minister direct on the telephone—and he answers. I called all the people I thought we ought to have in on it—the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, Supply, the Prime Minister's secretary—and arranged a meeting next day. We had a big round-table meeting where I told them the story, making most of it up because I had only the basic idea from Emeric—who sat beaming throughout—and they promised us every possible support, gave us letters of introduction right across the continent.

By the time we came back, Duff Cooper was Minister of Information and the Treasury were rather naturally against the scheme because things were in a terrible state—France was falling and there was tremendous chaos. In spite of that I sold the idea to Duff Cooper and they put up, out of the Treasury, £50,000 in dollars. I was able to contact my actors and get off within about a month. Almost immediately after we landed my Chief of Construction, Sid Streeter, started to build the submarine in Halifax while I was already shooting; I think we started in the mid-west. We'd roughed the whole script out and then Emeric started to write the actual script with dialogue with Rodney Ackland. Emeric's English was still not first rate, but his grasp of the drama and the shape of the scenes was excellent. But he needed to work with an English dialogue writer.

They started on the first episode with Laurence Olivier while I went off to shoot the rest of the stuff off-the-cuff. We had to: we had to catch the harvest for the Hutterite sequence, then I had to shoot the stuff in the Rockies and then go up to Hudson Bay and round the Labrador coast to get the submarine scenes and the landing at the Hudson Bay post. All before it was too late, because if you're too late in the Hudson Bay the ice can be early. It was all working against time, but as we had complete control ourselves, nobody to argue with, we brought it all off. When we came back to England the Blitz was on. We had shot Raymond

Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson in 'Contraband'

Massey's sequence with Eric Portman in a little documentary studio in Montreal because he was already in the Forces and couldn't come over. But the other actors who had given us their word, like Olivier who was in Hollywood when he promised me, Anton Walbrook and Leslie Howard who had promised before we went, they all kept their word.

That was really the start of wartime films, the proper start. Gabriel Pascal was making *Major Barbara* at that time but nobody was really swinging into wartime films as we were with the help of the MOI. From then on every film we made during the war sprang organically from the one we'd just made because, first of all, we were guessing a year ahead what the general position of the war would be and what would be the propaganda message. After all, films take a year to make and get out, particularly if you're writing, producing and directing them yourself, and so we had to be good guessers. The only one we guessed wrong on was *A Canterbury Tale*—there was a reason for that which I'll come back to.

We had started to think what sort of film we ought to make next, and I remember quite clearly that I said to Emeric that this phrase 'one of our aircraft failed to return' was a wonderful one to build a story around and would he think about it. After he'd finished his work on the writing of *49th Parallel,* he did think about it and by that time the phrase had been turned to the eventual title of our film, *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942). I guess they thought 'failed to return' was too downbeat. Emeric came up with the idea of turning the story of *49th Parallel* inside out, which is a typically Hungarian manoeuvre but it was also an interesting idea to show how one of our bomber crews got on in occupied territory.

This was our first independent production as The Archers. We saw pretty clearly that unless we ran our own affairs somebody else would run them for us: everybody seemed quite keen that we should, so we did. It went on that way until after the war, when Rank asked us to form Independent Producers and then we invited other people in. That was also the time that we invented our combined credit, which was a way of describing our work. Nobody ever directed but me. I remember my agent was surprised but I told him, 'We're going to invent a credit in the order which we think is important, which is writer, producer and then the director.' Not many people think of it that way. I've always resented so much the way writers are treated in films. Anyway, we more or less decided that almost unsaid.

There was one nice scene in *One of Our Aircraft* which I shot but later had to cut out; it's between Godfrey Tearle and Hugh Burden as the elderly rear gunner and the young pilot. They are talking about the girl (played by Pamela Brown) and suddenly the older man makes an observation which startles the young man. He says, 'You know, you are like what I was when I was young and I'm like what you will be like when you're old.' In other words they were both typically British. Then the young fellow looks at him and says, 'Are you right in the head, George?' At first nobody understood the old boy and they didn't bother to, they just thought he was a bit of a nuisance. Later he proved that his experience in everything really meant something. What was really interesting about this was that out of this story Emeric said, 'Why don't we make a film about this theme that young men can't understand the old men and old men can't explain what it is to be experienced?' And that started the idea of making a film called 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy'.

As it progressed and became more and more an epic, a saga of a wonderful, half-lovable, half-infuriating character, it occurred to one of us, I don't know which, to lug in Colonel Blimp. It was probably because the whole idea seemed to chime together and the thought of dramatising the life of Colonel Blimp appealed enormously, because at that time Blimp was a household word. That was how *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) evolved. And that was when all the trouble started which everybody now knows about. (*See the dossier following this interview for the story.*)

Some time before this, Jack Beddington, who had been Head of Publicity for Shell, had been appointed in charge of the MOI's films division in the place of Kenneth Clark. We began to have very lively contacts with him. He had a very good mind himself, and as well as understanding publicity, he understood artists and creative people and he took great pains, he and the Ministry, to put us all in touch with the people who were doing documentaries and training films. I remember going there to see films smuggled out of Europe, two or three times a week sometimes, to see films on blood transfusion, on plastic surgery for pilots who were burned . . . He took great trouble that feature film-makers should be well-informed, much better

'A Canterbury Tale': '. . . there's a lot of a little boy growing up in that film'

informed than the average person about what was going on in the war. It was very good, don't you think?

I'm sure it was with Jack that we had most of the rows about *Colonel Blimp*. They weren't really rows: simply that we were determined to make it and they were determined that we shouldn't. Beddington and Brendan Bracken were probably laughing like hell in their offices, but they had to do what they were told and follow the policy of the War Office and the Cabinet. James Grigg was the one who started the alarm but afterwards he withdrew the whole thing. The thing that affected us was that not only could we not have Laurence Olivier to play Blimp, we couldn't have one gun, one rifle, one uniform or one truck. So everything we have on the screen in the form of khaki uniforms and trucks is stolen. We could have been shot for it, I suppose, but then nobody minded about a little thing like that then! It shows how well film prop men had been trained by Korda, you know, how do you make a Hungarian omelette . . . first steal three eggs. Alfred Junge was wonderful, he hadn't been on *One of Our Aircraft* because at first all enemy aliens were interned. There was a story: he was interned at Liverpool in a big camp where a lot of very good art directors were interned who'd worked for Korda. They were all put to work at camouflaging the camp and they did it so well nobody could find it! Alfred was always known as Uncle Alfred to the entire unit.

I don't really know whether *Blimp* was ever shown in its complete version because, at the time of its premiere, I was already in the Mediterranean shooting material for *The Volunteer* (1943). I was on the beach in Oran, Algeria, wondering how to get off it. Of course, I got off with the Americans, that's the answer always. More or less right away, the Rank people, they loved the picture but decided it was too long for commercial release in wartime and asked us to cut it. I've got a feeling that all the opening sequences with the young soldier bursting into the Turkish bath were lopped and the film made into a straightforward narrative story instead of being mostly in flashback. That may have been partly because of opposition from Churchill and the War Office, because it is a much less abrasive way of telling the story. But we had quite consciously set out to make a big epic because we didn't think we could tell the three episodes of Blimp's life in much less than two hours and a half.

The cast of *Blimp* was marvellous. Deborah Kerr is enormously sensitive and responds to a director particularly. I think she could have gone on to become a very great actress, but she went on as a contract artist with MGM for just too long. Her performance, performances really, were clever too—with help from me, she makes the three girls absolutely different. And I had always wanted to work with Roger Livesey; he was going to be in *The Phantom Light* (1935) but Michael Balcon didn't like his voice, that lovely hoarse voice of Roger's. Mickey Balcon was very suburban in his tastes. I hadn't the slightest doubt; when C. M. Woolf and Arthur Rank said to me if you can't get Olivier who will you get, I said Roger Livesey. 'Is he available?' 'Yes, he's working in an aircraft factory'—I'd already found that out.

Pamela Brown in 'I Know Where I'm Going!'; David Farrar in 'The Small Back Room'

Then we planned *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), which was to be about Americans in England and also an examination of materialism (in the form of the organist/soldier played by Dennis Price) against idealism (as exemplified by the young American soldier). That was really the reason for making the film, because we thought the moral issues of the war were almost as exciting as the war that was being fought. The whole idea was to examine the values for which we were fighting and to do it partly through the eyes of a young American who was training in England. That's where we guessed wrong, because by the time the film came out, all the Americans were off fighting in North Africa.

Roger Livesey in 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp'

The critics didn't like the glueman business—they were rather shocked. They thought there was something a bit perverted and horrible about it—'we always suspected this of Powell'—they'd heard vaguely that some people loved to throw jam at naked girls and they thought this was the idea. You can't imagine how prudish people were then, you should read some of the reviews. I remember also the suggestion that the young girl spent her holiday in the caravan with her young man shocked some people—'Are we to understand that Mr. Powell and Mr. Pressburger are advocates of free love?' They couldn't believe that this had actually been said in a film—I thought they can't have been around too much. Such ridiculous conventions there were.

The only thing wrong with *Canterbury Tale* is that Emeric got crazy about the story and it's far too complicated—Agatha Christie couldn't have done better. I said, 'Emeric, don't worry, I shall be doing all my atmospheric stuff and getting to Canterbury with the pilgrims, you don't have to bother about working out all the story.' They have several pointless discussions about who the glueman is, when it's quite obvious from the first shot of Eric Portman that it's him. That's what happens, Emeric used to laugh sometimes and say, 'I'd forgotten you were going to *see* it.' So it was a failure and practically hasn't been seen until recently. Now it looks a wonderful film, I think, I was really thrilled with it. It's got all the things I knew so well: I was born and brought up in and around Canterbury and there's a lot of a little boy growing up in the film. Of course, what I love is this semi-mystical feeling that you get . . . anybody who has lived near Canterbury's old stones must have this feeling.

There is one thing it might please you to know: the film opens, if you remember, with a staggeringly successful tracking shot through the bells of the belfry, a most intricate and beautiful shot that finishes up looking through a little oriel window opening out on the east end of Canterbury. Alfred Junge loved this idea of starting with the bells and had designed it all; one day I asked him how we were going to do it. He said, 'I will build the bells from papier-maché at one-eighth scale, and it will all work like the real bells.' Then about a week before we were supposed to shoot it, he came to me beaming and said, 'Do you know what I've got, Mickey? I have the team of bell ringers from Canterbury to ring the bells.' They all came down for the day—it was lovely, don't you think? All the shots in the Cathedral were studio created because we couldn't shoot in the real Cathedral.

This is where Jack Beddington comes into the picture again. He said to us, 'I want you to consider that our relations with the Americans were very good while we were losing the war, but now we're winning it, they're getting very bad. Will you write a story which plays up American/English relationships.' Emeric suggested a love story and came up with *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). However, we found out that all the Technicolor cameras, crews and stock were tied up on training films and we had to postpone the film for a year. I said to Emeric, 'We've got to think up a film to make this

year or we shall be drafted into the Services,' because I was already technically in the Navy. He said, 'There is a story I've always wanted to make about a girl who wants to get to an island, she's quite close and she can see the people on it but she can't get there.' I asked him, reasonably enough, I thought, why she wanted to get there. 'Oh, let's make the film and then we'll find out.'

I'd rented a cottage in Devon for my father who had escaped from France, so we all went down there and Emeric wrote the basic script, not just the story but the basic screenplay of *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) in about five days. Then I snatched up these sheets of paper and rushed off to find the island: because until I know where I'm going to make a film, I can't visualise it, I can't get on with it. I have to know all the answers and then the other things start to expand. That's how we usually worked. I went to several places and finally chose the Isle of Mull in the Hebrides because the bleakness and beauty suited the story.

I thought Pamela Brown's part was particularly intriguing and called her Catriona after the witch in the legend. She was obviously in love with Torquil (Roger Livesey) and would have been in love with him at any time in the past two or three centuries. I wanted to get that over without ever actually saying it. Originally, I had a lot more stuff of her watching Torquil. I shot a scene at the end when he apparently leaves Wendy Hiller and goes into the Castle to face the curse; in the scene Catriona followed him in there and watched what he was going to do, as if she were drawn there by the same inspiration as him, the same legend. I think there is much more goes on in life—below the surface—than people realise. It's not really mysticism as far as I can see: I think life is like that, it's not everything that you see but many layers underneath.

I like these unexpressed things, they can be enormously effective in a film. I think I probably learned that from seeing the early German films which were full of unexpressed and beautiful ideas—films like *Destiny*. In other words I'm a great 'eye' but I also believe there's more than meets the eye. But *I Know Where I'm Going!* was only a partial success; it's a film that has grown to be much loved over the years. Wendy Hiller was very clever in it, the way she worked it all out: we just had little talks about how we would gradually change and she would become more and more natural. We were paying her back in a way because originally she was going to play the girl that Deborah Kerr played in *Blimp*. But she had a baby instead.

We went straight into *A Matter of Life and Death* afterwards because Technicolor was now available. The script had been ready the previous year, and I remember quite clearly that I was shooting the last day's work on *I Know Where I'm Going!*—the scene where Roger Livesey runs down to the quay and tries to stop the boy taking the boat out—when suddenly somebody came to me and said, 'We've got you on the Queen Mary and she leaves tonight.' I left the camera, Roger, everything. I yelled back to Roger, 'Direct yourself!' Which he did. There were about 20,000 Americans on the ship, about ten of us in one cabin. On the way over I worked on the script from a medical point of view; I had all my notes in a special file on medical cases which I'd been looking up through my brother-in-law, who is a great surgeon. I don't think I ever stated what was wrong with the young flier (David Niven) after he's crashed in the bomber. A previous injury had caused adhesions on the brain . . . probably I didn't want to state it too much because so many people had had bangs and bumps during the war and you didn't want people to get too worried . . . anyway, these adhesions can produce pressures on various parts of the brain which can produce what are called 'highly organised hallucinations'. These can be comparable to an experience of actual life.

I use this phrase because it was quoted to me by the surgeon who did the job in the particular case I was studying. And then he uttered another marvellous phrase which really altered the whole conception of the film. He said, 'And this illusion can take place in space but *not* in time.' And that's what we showed with the 'frozen' ping-pong game and David Niven sitting up during the operation with everyone around him frozen in time—we had lots of fun then. There is this whole hallucination taking place in the thousandth of a fraction of a second.

I believe we used the ping-pong game because Emeric thought of it as the most wonderful thing to stop in motion. It's done by a combination of stop-frame and posing by the actors with the ball suspended on an invisible thread. Very nearly all my tricks are a combination of two or three different things. At first, it was suggested that when I froze the scene, we should then re-project it in back-projection and then David Niven would come in and look at it. I said, 'That won't work, he's got to walk all around them.' So Roger Livesey said, 'I can stay absolutely still—even with a funny expression on my face—if Kim (Hunter) will.' Of course, David Niven then tried his damnedest to make them laugh during the shooting—but that was how we got it.

We had gone to America to find an actress to play the young American girl in the film. Those were the days when British films had prestige and, of course, all the producers in Hollywood and studio owners and owners of girls were really genuinely anxious to help us, but also genuinely anxious to get their girl into the film. Everybody we saw was wrong, we wanted an absolutely natural, clever girl, an actress but still like any other girl. I was explaining this to Hitchcock, who was giving us dinner, and he said, 'Well, Mickey, there's a girl I was testing for Selznick the other day, he wants to give her a contract.' 'What's her name?' He said, 'Oh, not *that* girl, the girl who was giving lines to the girl that I was testing for Selznick who wanted to give her a contract.' 'Well, did he give her a contract?' 'Oh, I don't know, Mickey, but he didn't give a contract to the girl who was giving the lines, because he didn't see her, but I did because she was alongside me—and she's the sort of girl you're looking for.' That was Kim Hunter.

I'm pretty sure it was Emeric's idea to do the other world in monochrome and this world in Technicolor. I decided to bleed the colour out of it, and that led to things like the rose losing its colour and then regaining the colour. We started shooting on Saunton Sands in Devon, all those sequences with David Niven being washed ashore after the bomber had crashed, the little naked boy piping with the goats all around. It was all a spoof, of course, I think people got that. But I wondered if I would get away with it at the time.

You see, in all these films I was finding out just what I could do. Fortunately, I hadn't any crass producer to say, 'What does that mean?' because half the time I didn't know what it meant either. I just felt it was right. The opening of the film, of course, with Niven spouting poetry and the bomber roaring down, that's all Powell. I took with me to America—as well as my medical notes—the Oxford Book of English Verse, so that I could pick out some good bits for Niven to declaim as the bomber fell.

The film was expensive but, on the other hand, it came in right on budget, and we had it all cut together a week after we'd finished shooting. Some of the big trick shots like leaving the court, going out into the starry sky and seeing the golden stairway forming, they were done 'in work' as we say—there's a blend of maybe a dozen different shots in that one sequence. We worked out the shots before shooting began, first up the staircase in perspective with the vast statues going away in the distance, and then down the staircase in perspective. All the angles were fixed and then the whole thing was shot in about one day. It was extraordinary how Junge had the whole thing worked out on the drawing board. But it's the only thing to do, otherwise you get yourself into a terrible tangle like they did on *The Thief of Bagdad*—the flying carpet sequence and things like that. It was the most beautifully planned and executed film I've ever worked on and it's my favourite of all my films because it looks so easy and it wasn't. A justification of the whole long training of the British film industry. I remember that we started shooting the film on the day that the Japanese surrendered, so that was the end of our British war service.

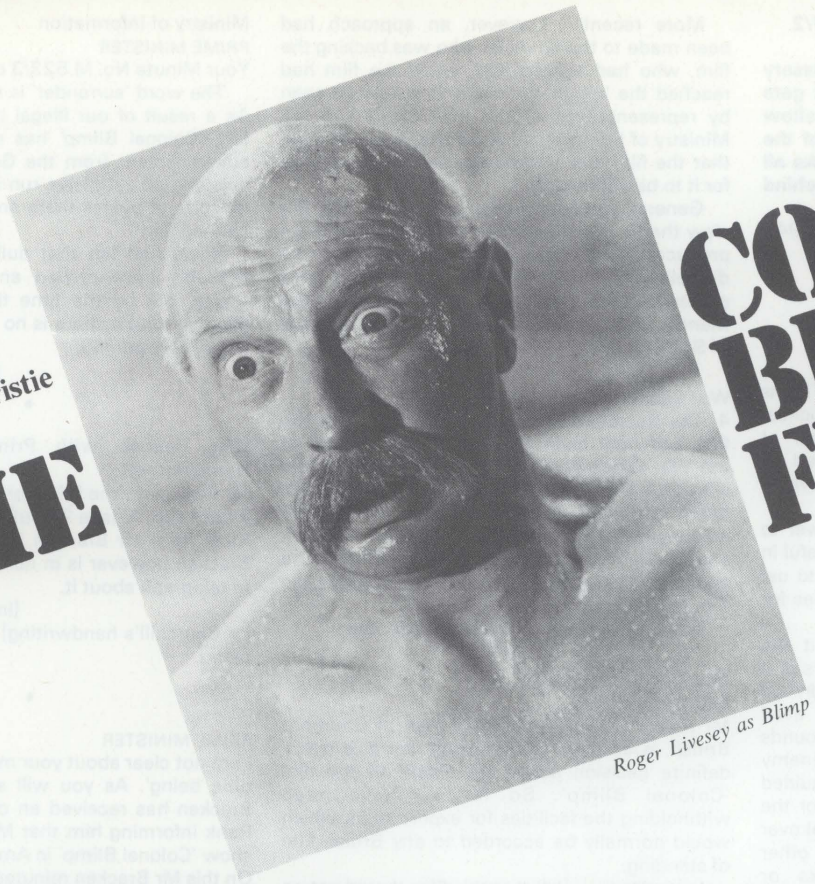
After making *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), we made another film with a war setting—*The Small Back Room* (1948). It was very interesting because it was a complete failure; nobody wanted to know about it because the war was over. They wanted *The Red Shoes,* they wanted *Black Narcissus,* anything with colour and romance, but the last thing they wanted was a love story shot in black-and-white and laid in wartime. It was a miscalculation on my part: I loved the book and since Korda had made, with Anthony Kimmins directing, a very successful psychological thriller of another Nigel Balchin book, *Mine Own Executioner,* I thought that at last I could get Korda to back *The Small Back Room*. But it was an error of judgment, after all, if the public didn't want to see it . . . that's not the intention. People sometimes forget that, they talk to me as if I've planned a film to be a failure. They can't all be good, they can't all be successes, but you do expect to make a profit—otherwise you're out of business. But then people don't usually risk their necks every day like I was doing.

That's correct, it never is appreciated that the bulk of these films were original stories written with the heart and the mind and the imagination. Hardly anybody has ever made the point but it's the main reason, I think, why, as the years go by, the films get better instead of worse.

Now, let's go and have that drink. ■

THE COLONEL BLIMP FILE

Ian Christie



Roger Livesey as Blimp

General Raymond E. Lee, an American liaison officer posted in London during the early years of the war, confided to his diary in 1940 that 'England was now being saved by its Blimps and its Blimpish character, and Churchill's strength and the reason he refuses to give ground anywhere is because he himself is a Blimpish character.' (*The London Observer,* 1940). A remarkable case of Churchill's refusal to give ground has recently come to light. Ironically, it concerns Colonel Blimp.

It has long been known that there was official opposition to Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. But the precise form of the opposition, and the extent to which it involved the Prime Minister himself, only became evident while I was working in the Public Record Office with Laurence Hayward, researching the role of the Ministry of Information in wartime film production. We were surprised to discover a special file of correspondence on the film between the War Office, the Prime Minister and the then Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken. Churchill, it reveals, had taken a lead in trying to suppress the film even while it was in production and had persisted in his opposition to the point where his colleagues were plainly embarrassed. In retrospect, it seems likely that Churchill's hostility helped to bring about the drastic cutting which Powell and Pressburger's epic suffered. The full details of Colonel Blimp's pruning to less than two hours are still not known, but thanks to the work of the National Film Archive restoration is now nearly complete, and a version only five minutes shorter than the original 163 minutes was recently shown at the National Film Theatre as one of the highlights of the Powell and Pressburger retrospective.—I.C.

The contents of the file (PREM 4 14/15) are reproduced here verbatim. Transcripts of Crown copyright records in the Public Record Office appear by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Further documentation, and a placing of the episode in context, can be found in Ian Christie's book Powell, Pressburger and Others (*British Film Institute, £1.50*).

From: Secretary of State for War

8 September 1942

PRIME MINISTER

I attach, as directed, a note on the Blimp film which is in course of being produced and which I think it of the utmost importance to get stopped.

P G[rigg]

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

1. The theme of the film is, according to the producer, the struggle of the junior officer in the Army against the obstructiveness of the Blimps at the top and his subsequent metamorphosis into a Blimp himself. The film begins with a collision between a young officer of today and Major-General Clive Candy, aged 66. The occasion is a Home Guard exercise for the defence of London. The young man starts his attack several hours before the exercise is due to begin and surprises the opposing general while the latter is still in his Turkish bath. This is supposed to be an example of ruthless initiative. The film then goes back to 1902 when the General himself was a subaltern with a similar intolerance of his elders and impetuous enough to embarrass the British Embassy in Germany by fighting a duel with a German officer. Then it traces his progress across the years in various parts of the British Empire, and so to the war of 1914-1918 and the post-war years. In the war of 1914-1918 Candy's playing the game according to the rules is contrasted with the greater realism of a South African officer. Candy's attitude between the wars is a lack of comprehension as to why the Germans cannot realise that they were fairly and squarely beaten and there is no reason why they should not make and remain friends. A confused love interest (with three different women) also complicates the story at various intervals.

2. The producer claims that the film is intended as a tribute to the toughness and keenness of the new Army in Britain and shows how far they have progressed from the Blimpery of the pre-war Army. From this point of view he urges that it would be valuable propaganda for the USA and the Dominions because in showing that we are conscious of any faults which we may possess, we are telling the rest of the world that the faults are being eliminated.

3. The War Office have refused to give their support to the film in any way on the ground that it would give the Blimp conception of the Army officer a new lease of life at a time when it is already dying from inanition. Whatever the film makes of the spirit of the young soldier of today, the fact remains that it focuses attention on an imaginary type of Army officer which has become an object of ridicule to the general public. In the opening scheme (*sic*) Candy is shown as Blimp himself complete with towel and everything. Whatever it may do elsewhere the film has made a character built up by twenty years of brilliant cartooning into a figure of fun, and there is the inescapable suggestion that such a man is a type or at any rate an example of those who have risen to high command in the Army in the period preceding this war.

4. There is the further objection that the Germans in the film are depicted as stiff and over-regimented in peace and as little more than very intense realists in war. The thug element in the make-up of the German soldier is ignored and indeed the suggestion is that if we were exactly like the Germans we should be better soldiers.

5. As stated above, the War Office have refused all facilities for the film, but production is still going on at Denham and the Minister of Information knows of no way in which it can be stopped. Steps have been taken, however, to bring home to the person financing the film the fact that it is viewed with disfavour by the War Office and that no Army facilities will be available. Whether anything will come of this indirect approach is at present uncertain.

Prime Minister's Personal Minute M.357/2
MINISTER OF INFORMATION
Pray propose to me the measures necessary to stop this foolish production before it gets any further. I am not prepared to allow propaganda detrimental to the morale of the Army, and I am sure the Cabinet will take all necessary action. Who are the people behind it?

W S C[hurchill] 10 September 1942

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Ministry of Information
PRIME MINISTER
The Colonel Blimp Film
Your minute No. M.357/2

This film is being produced by Archer Films Ltd, a company entirely owned by Mr Michael Powell and Mr Emmerich Pressburger. I understand that the production is financed by General Film Distributors Ltd, the head of which is Mr Joseph Rank.

The Ministry of Information has no power to suppress the film. We have been unsuccessful in discouraging it by the only means open to us: that is, by withholding Government facilities for its production.

I am advised that in order to stop it the Government would need to assume powers of a very far-reaching kind. These could hardly be less than powers to suppress all films, even those based on imaginary stories, on grounds not of their revealing information to the enemy but of their expressing harmful or misguided opinions. Moreover it would be illogical for the Government to insist on a degree of control over films which it does not exercise over other means of expression, such as books or newspaper articles. Nothing less, therefore, than the imposition of a compulsory censorship of opinion upon all means of expression would meet the case, and I am certain that this could not be done without provoking infinite protest.

If you or the War Office were to let it be known to Mr Rank that it is your wish that the film should be dropped, I feel sure that it would be dropped. But I do not think that any approach of this kind should come from the Ministry of Information. As the Department responsible for Censorship, the Ministry is liable to be suspected of abusing its Censorship powers and requests from us frequently meet with a resistance which they would not encounter if made by a Department that has no connection with Censorship.

B[rendan] B[racken] 15 September 1942

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Prime Minister's Personal Minute M.381/2
MINISTER OF INFORMATION
We should act not on the grounds of 'expressing harmful or misguided opinions' but on the perfectly precise point of 'undermining the discipline of the Army'. You and the Secretary of State should bring the matter before the Cabinet on Monday [*marginal note:* **'This was done'**] **when I have no doubt any special authority you may require will be given you. The Ministry of Information is the seat of the Censorship, and consequently you are the channel for any Cabinet decision on the subject.**

W S C 17 September 1942

*

War Cabinet 126 (42). 21 September 1942
7. The Secretary of State for War said that a film about 'Colonel Blimp' was being made. Facilities had been asked for from the War Office. These had been refused, on the ground that the film was likely to bring ridicule upon the Army. The producers had, nevertheless, proceeded with the making of the film, which was now at an advanced stage.

There was no existing Defence Regulation under which the film could be suppressed. He understood that the Minister of Information was averse from taking the very wide powers which would be necessary to stop this film.

More recently, however, an approach had been made to the financier who was backing the film, who had agreed that, when the film had reached the 'rough cut stage' it should be seen by representatives of the War Office and the Ministry of Information; and if they took the view that the film was undesirable he would arrange for it to be withdrawn.

General agreement was expressed with the view that it was impossible to allow a film to be produced which was liable to undermine the discipline of the Army; and satisfaction was expressed that this could be achieved by the friendly arrangement outlined by the Secretary of State for War.

*

War Cabinet 67 (43). 10 May 1943.
4. The Secretary of State for War said that the film had now been seen by representatives of the War Office and the Ministry of Information, who took the view that it was unlikely to attract much attention or to have any undesirable consequences on the discipline of the Army. In the circumstances, he had reached the conclusion that the right plan was to allow the film to be shown.

The War Cabinet — Endorsed this view.

*

Ministry of Information
PRIME MINISTER
Mr Arthur Rank, who is Chairman of Gaumont British, is asking if this Ministry can give him a definite decision about the export of the film 'Colonel Blimp'. So far we have been withholding the facilities for export by air which would normally be accorded to any British film of standing.

Is it still your wish that this film should not go abroad? We have no legal power to stop it, and indeed the statements appearing in the newspapers saying that it has been banned probably only serve to advertise it.

My advice is that the film should be allowed to go. At a time when the prestige of the British higher Command and of the British fighting man stands higher in the world than it has ever done, I think the circulation of this evident fantasy presents no dangers at all. But if you still feel strongly that it should not go abroad, I will try to find means of continuing our illegal ban.

B B 9 July 1943

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Prime Minister's Personal Minute M.459/3
MINISTER OF INFORMATION
I think you should certainly stop it going abroad as long as you possibly can.

W S C 11 July 1943

*

Ministry of Information
PRIME MINISTER
You asked in your Minute No. M.459/3 that this Ministry should stop the film 'Colonel Blimp' from going abroad as long as we possibly could.

This we have so far managed to do by the unorthodox expedient of refusing the normal facilities for transport abroad by air. But even if we were able to persist in this expedient, we could not either by legal or illegal action prevent the film from going abroad by other means.

We have now had an official letter from Mr Rank, the producer of the film, informing us that he would like to show it in America and in the Empire. As the film is so boring I cannot believe it will do any harm abroad to anyone except the company which made it. And as this Ministry has no reason to protect the company from the consequences of its follies, I should propose to tell Mr Rank that he may make his own arrangements accordingly.

B B 23 July 1943

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Prime Minister's Personal Minute M.523/3
MINISTER OF INFORMATION
I do not agree with this surrender. Will you please discuss the matter with me. If necessary we must take more powers.

W S C 25 July 1943

Ministry of Information
PRIME MINISTER
Your Minute No. M.523/3 of 25 July.

The word 'surrender' is not in our vocabulary! As a result of our illegal ban on this wretched film 'Colonel Blimp' has received a wonderful advertisement from the Government. It is now enjoying an extensive run in the suburbs and in all sorts of places there are notices — 'See the banned film!'

If we had left that dull film alone it would probably have proved an unprofitable undertaking, but by the time the Government have finished with it there is no knowing what profits it will have earned.

B B 5 August 1943

*

[Slip headed with Prime Minister's seal. Handwritten]
Mr Rowan (Prime Minister's secretary)
Please see 'A' [see 23 July above]. A reply to Mr Rank from Mr Bracken is now outstanding; Mr Bracken however is in no hurry and told me not to telegraph about it.

[initials indecipherable]
[in Churchill's handwriting] Leave it for the time being.

*

PRIME MINISTER
I am not clear about your minute 'Leave it for the time being'. As you will see from Flag A, Mr Bracken has received an official letter from Mr Rank informing him that Mr Rank would like to show 'Colonel Blimp' in America and the Empire. On this Mr Bracken minuted:

'And as the Ministry has no reason for trying to protect the company from the consequences of its follies, I should propose to tell Mr Rank that he may make his own arrangements accordingly.'

May I now be informed that you approve this?

T L R[owan] 15 August 1943
[Churchill's handwriting] No. I am obstructing. Leave it till Mr B arrives.

*

MOST SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM
From: Air Ministry. To: Quadrant (Ministry of Information). 19 August 1943
Following for Sendall from Hodge.

We have had a further letter from Mr Rank requesting facilities for the export of the film 'Colonel Blimp'. He says it has broken all previous box-office records for the Odeon circuit of cinemas. In view of this it is becoming practically impossible to maintain our illegal ban. May we have directions?

*

MOST SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM
From: Quadrant. To: War Cabinet Offices London. 25 August 1943
Following for Hodge, Ministry of Information, from Sendall.
Approval to release 'Blimp' has now been secured.

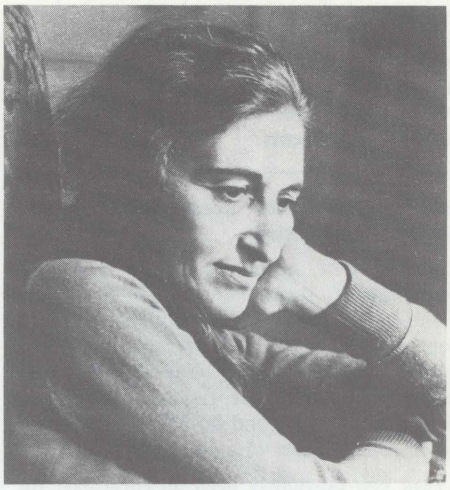
The final document in the Blimp file is a letter from Sendall of the Ministry of Information to the Prime Minister's secretary.

Ministry of Information
21 September 1943
Dear Rowan,
I am returning your file about the release of 'Colonel Blimp' which somehow or other came into my hands while we were in America.

As you know, the Prime Minister finally authorised Mr Bracken to withdraw his ban on the export of this film.

Yours sincerely,
B C Sendall
[handwritten] I didn't; but P.A./T L R 22.9

'Where could I meet other screenwriters?'



A conversation with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala

John Pym

Massachusetts, early October. The author Ruth Prawer Jhabvala occupies a bare, modern room in an anonymous modern hotel in Leominster. The room seems to contain only a typewriter, a few papers and a well-preserved copy of the Penguin edition of Henry James' novel *The Europeans*. She likes the hotel: it takes care of the domestic arrangements, not her forte, and the atmosphere is conducive to hard work. A few miles away at the Barrett House, across the state line in New Ipswich, N.H., her colleagues, the producer Ismail Merchant and the director James Ivory, have just started filming her (and Ivory's) adaptation of *The Europeans*. It is their eighth film together in 15 years. The budget, Merchant estimates, will be about £450,000, and the money, as always, is coming from various sources: individuals in Britain and the United States; the German production company Polytel; and the British National Film Finance Corporation. The crew is largely British, and all but two of the cast American: Lee Remick stars as the Baroness, and Tim Woodward plays her brother Felix. The house and its adjoining cottage, supposedly just outside Boston, are exactly the right period and positioned just as James described them. Sand is sprinkled on the road and we seem to be in the 19th century. Mrs. Jhabvala, however, prefers to remain in her hotel.

Born in Cologne in 1927 to Polish parents, Ruth Prawer came to England in 1939: she had been writing in German since she was six, but almost at once switched to English. She took a degree in English at Queen Mary College, London University, and soon afterwards married an Indian architect and moved to Delhi. For some 24 years she lived almost wholly cut off from European society: she raised three daughters and at the same time wrote continuously. Her eighth novel, *Heat and Dust*, won the Booker prize for fiction in 1975. The debilitating Indian climate and the tensions of Indian life—tensions detailed in her novels—now compel Mrs. Jhabvala to divide her time between Delhi and a new home in Manhattan. In 1963, she began a fruitful, and until recently a virtually exclusive collaboration with Merchant and Ivory, which has resulted in a series of films—*The Householder* (1963), from her own novel, *Shakespeare-Wallah* (1965), *The Guru* (1968), *Bombay Talkie* (1970), *Autobiography of a Princess* (1975), *Roseland* (1977) and *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* (1978)—all of which, with the exception of *Roseland*, have a European/Indian

'The Europeans'

background. James' early short novel about the arrival of two 'Europeans' at the home of their proper New England cousins and the genteel, faintly humorous disorder they create, seems tailored for Mrs. Jhabvala's gentle, ironic talents.

Could you say a few words about how you came to screenwriting.

RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA: Well, Jim and Ismail came to make *The Householder*. I was in India at that time. They bought the book from me and I wrote the screenplay. I had never thought of doing any screenwriting before, and I was so surprised when they said 'Why don't you try and do it?' But it seemed reasonable, I mean who else would do it?

Had you previously been an enthusiast for the cinema?

No, no, not at all. I'm still not. Never have been. During all the years in India I hardly saw any films. I started coming out slowly in 1966, so I saw a few more . . . but I lived in India from 1951 to 1975 and really never saw anything. And that's probably why I am one of the few screenwriters who doesn't want to direct. All I supply are the things that a writer should supply, like the characters, the situations and the dialogue. I'm perfectly content to leave everything else to other people.

Is your approach to a screenplay similar to your approach to a piece of fiction, or do you write shot by shot?

Not shot by shot, but certainly not like a piece of fiction. The process is quite different. With a novel or short story I have to do so much more. I have to do everything. With a screenplay, I make more of a plan. I know what each scene is going to be, although the scenes develop within the framework and sometimes come out not quite as I expected. I don't do this in a book. In a book I just grope about and hope for the best. In a screenplay I have got much more of an idea. Having the idea for a scene, I work towards it through the characters. Mostly by means of the dialogue. I'm not really very visual myself.

You don't picture the scene? The locations usually seem very important in your scripts. They seem to have been chosen quite specifically.

No. Let me give you an example. I knew that the last film, *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures*, was going to be set in an Indian palace, but I didn't know which one. I thought it might be Gwalior, which I hadn't seen. I knew Jodhpur quite well because we had done *Autobiography of a Princess* there. I knew lots of Indian palaces, so I knew more or less what the layout would be, more or less what I had in mind. Of course, in general, that's always there. The people are not floating around in space. But just as the characters in your mind look different from the actors who finally play them, so does the place. But you do have to have a place in mind, and all its ambience and atmosphere.

Your literary style would seem easily adaptable to screenwriting. Do you feel that the cinema at all influenced your fictional writing?

In the beginning that would be quite unconscious. Of course, I had written quite a number of novels before I wrote screenplays. I may have been influenced by the films I saw as a child more than I realised. The dialogue in my novels, however, is qualitatively different from that in the screenplays. That's always so, you can't transpose the one from the other. The dialogue in the novel has to carry all the inflections, all the intonations, everything that the speech of the actor will give it in the film. The actors put in the weight, they give it colour. But in the novel you have to do all that yourself.

When you were adapting *The Householder*, did you rewrite the fictional dialogue?

Oh, yes, you can't speak fiction. This comes out especially with Henry James. It's marvellous, wonderful dialogue, but you can't speak it.

You said you might have been unconsciously influenced by the films you saw as a child. Did you go to the cinema then a great deal?

I think as a child I did. As much as other children, say once or twice a week. I used to see everything. This would be from about 1936 to 1951. When I left school, I didn't see so many films. I lost interest. I was reading a lot. During my last few years in England I didn't see so many. And then when the New Wave came in I was in India.

Were you brought up on popular writers' films from Hollywood?

I was born in Germany, where we weren't allowed to go to the cinema being Jews. Whenever I went to Holland, which was quite often, I used to see films, but they were then dubbed into Dutch. I think I must have seen my first American movies in Dutch. Then I went to England and from '40 to '45 I saw everything. I saw all the war films, and then after the War I saw some Ealing comedies, that sort of thing. I think the first European film that came my way was Rossellini's *Open City*. I did see those very strongly storied films of the 30s, very conventional, magazine stories at the centre. I felt that films have to tell some sort of story. Now I live in New York and I see everything. I go just around the corner, I like it. I don't run, but I certainly see everything that everyone else sees, and I go to revival houses too. I have never actually met another screenwriter. Where could I?

What was your background as a novelist?

Just the usual influences. I started writing stories as soon as I could write, and I read everything there was to read. I wrote and wrote and had drawers full of unfinished novels, unfinished stories and unfinished plays. And then when I was old enough, I started sending things round. My brother is very literary, he's Professor of German Literature at Oxford. He was always reading German classics, which I wasn't. I mean, I do have a certain literary background, but no actual writers in the family. I think the Jewish writer Sholem Ash is somehow related to me, or maybe only by marriage, but we certainly all came from the same town in Poland. I don't come from a background where writing would be anything strange. I was a student, and then I married, and then I went to India and then I wrote the first novel. The first novel that I actually finished and sent to a publisher was accepted. I went to four publishers and the fourth one took it. I was 25 when I wrote my first novel and 28 when it was published. I wasn't ready to publish anything before then.

Have you thought of writing screenplays for anyone other than Merchant and Ivory?

Well, yes. I wouldn't mind. It's never come up, though. If anybody has asked me, they usually propose projects I'm not interested in. I haven't any plans to adapt any of my other works of fiction. Actually David Mercer has adapted *Heat and Dust*. On the whole, I'd rather not do my own novels. It's not so interesting.

When you finish your novels, you prefer that they be left alone?

It's not that. I don't want to go back to

'The Householder'

them. I don't mind if somebody else does it, that's fine. I'd rather do something new. I haven't read Mercer's screenplay. That was the novel of mine which was most influenced by film. The way I'm now influenced by film is that I go into the editing room. I'm not altogether as innocent as I pretend. Now when I write a screenplay it's always with the editing room in mind. I was in the editing room from the first film onwards. I stay away from the sets. There's nothing I can do and I don't understand what's going on, I'm just in the way. I always trip over the wires. But I'm always in the editing room. Well, when they have the first rough cuts, that's when I get interested.

You are here during the shooting of *The Europeans*. Are you editing the script as they go along?

I've been here for a week and I have been doing quite a bit. But I'll go back to New York and then come and go. I'm here now because I don't like being alone in New York. At the moment, though, I think it's a good thing that I'm here since I've been doing a lot of rewriting and seeing the actors and cutting scenes. I usually consult the actors, especially when I've made cuts, and they usually have something very interesting to add. I often make some change according to what they say. The particular danger with this script has been all this marvellous Henry James dialogue. I threw up my hands. It was awful. I put it down and then, after I had re-read it, I found that I'd still kept in too much. I mean you can't have people sitting and talking too much, however wonderful the dialogue is. You just cannot in a film.

One of the nice things about the novel is the ending, the marrying off of all the couples. How are you doing that? With a voice-over?

Eugenia and Acton is the one match that doesn't come off.

Yes, but he marries a 'nice girl'.

He marries a 'particularly nice girl'. Well we haven't got that, we haven't got the nice girl. But as Acton rides away from her house, leaving Eugenia packing, he sees the other couples dotted about the countryside.

Have you changed the novel a great deal?

I've certainly switched it around and changed the structure. I haven't changed the story, but I have changed the way the story develops. You have to build up to something central, something big. The novel is a succession of small scenes which don't build up to anything particular. We've added a ball at Mr. Acton's house to which everything builds up, and from which everything then comes down. Everything from various parts of the novel is pulled together here. Eugenia's visit to Mrs. Acton, which is an isolated incident in the book, is the centre of that ball scene. And the way Eugenia feels when she comes out. She leaves Acton's house and feels she has been a failure, that's really the central part of this scene. Also Jim has to have a big party in his films. A big party and lots of meals. There were lots of meals in the book but there wasn't a big party. Henry James obviously rings bells for me. This feeling I had about Europeans coming to India, he has about Americans going to Europe. Everything he did has always struck particular bells.

How did you come to *The Europeans*?

The script was actually written three years ago, but we couldn't get money for it. We put it off from year to year, always thinking that we had to start in May, just had to start in May because that's when the novel starts. But this year Jim said, 'Ah well, if we are not going to make it now, let it be the dead of winter, I don't care.' That's why we're here among the fall leaves of Massachusetts. For a long time actually I thought about *Portrait of a Lady*, then about *The Bostonians* and *The Golden Bowl*. I would have longed to have done those, but they are very long and complicated and expensive. Jim just loved *The Europeans* and he loves this part of the world and he wanted to come home to America, so for him this was really the best thing to do. But I'd love to do some of the others, *Portrait of a Lady* in particular. They have found a house in Salem [the Gardner Pingree House] for Mr. Acton's house, though I don't think the ball is going to be filmed there. I think they've found another place for that.

Would you like to do any other adaptations of classic American authors now that you're living in New York?

No, I've always preferred to do original screenplays. I think I might do another film set in New York. I can't say much about this since I haven't really thought about it. It may be set among theatre groups, in lofts. I have to live in a place to write about it. I actually have to be there, to look out of the window and see the weather. Now I spend about three months of the year in India. I take with me whatever I'm doing and pretend I'm here. I don't look around in India. It's a great disability. When I think that a writer like Joyce carried Dublin everywhere, wherever he went. He unfolded it and unfolded it and it was always his interior landscape. I don't have anything like that, unfortunately. There is a storehouse of memories, but I want to be right there, to be triggered right there. I want to hear the speech rhythms of everybody round me. This is not true of the adaptations. *The Europeans* I did in India when I was still living there. The idea for the new film is a Jane Austen unpublished play. We did *Hullabaloo* for Melvyn Bragg [The South Bank Show, London Weekend Television] and he has the rights for the Jane Austen play. I think the play was bought by David Astor. The idea, perhaps, is to have this very advanced theatre group in New York do the play, and see what they make of it. I think there always has to be a bizarre touch to everything we do, otherwise we don't feel quite at ease.

I was struck seeing *Hullabaloo* on a cinema screen how well it looked. It was, of course, made for television . . .

Yes, but, you know, whenever you have a really good film director and he makes a film for television that is a *film* and not a television play. I think that is the difference. I think a film director can switch, but not the other way round. We also did *Autobiography of a Princess* for television. Then I've written two television plays, one was done by Granada and the other will be done by the BBC next year. I really don't think about the difference between TV and cinema audiences. But television plays are different from films, again you have to switch a bit. You can use much more dialogue. In a film, you can think much more about location, it opens up much more, the dialogue is not so important. Essentially, I think a television play is people closed up in a room talking.

What about the Indian cinema?

There's no possibility there for me. The only Indian cinema for me, as for practically everybody else, is Satyajit Ray, such a giant and so truly Indian. When I see his films, I know that I couldn't make the right film in India, because mine would only be a European view. It always seemed impossible to make our kind of films. I think the fact that we have been able to is entirely and absolutely due to Ismail. Once he has made up his mind, he'll just go out and find the money

Peggy Ashcroft in 'Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures'

'The Europeans': Lisa Eichhorn

somewhere, somehow. Everybody tells you it's impossible, but he's done it for years now. I just don't think about it any more. So who cares about studios? It would be nice to have some money for a change, and for him not to have to jump up and down like that and really go through such terrible things to make the films. It would be nice to have some backing, it would certainly be restful, but if that doesn't happen he'll go on doing it. He's never failed once. I think I must have the highest average in the world for screenplays that have been *made*. I must have written, I can't remember exactly, eight or ten—I think it's ten—and of those eight have been made. That's entirely because Ismail makes up his mind that he is going to do a film. If he wants to do a film, he'll do it.

Do you feel that you are writing for a dying art?

Good heavens, no. Have you seen the queues outside New York cinemas? For instance, *Interiors* and *Days of Heaven* are playing in New York now, I think, to absolutely packed houses with long lines outside. I think they are both very, very superior films, that anybody would have been proud to make. We are always hoping that one day we will be playing to packed houses. You can't tell, it just happens that you may tap the right note. Meanwhile, our films seem to be known all right, they are shown. What more can we ask? Some very cheap films have done extremely well. It's just striking a chord somewhere, and I believe one shouldn't think about it either. You can't start off and say I'm going to do this to get a huge audience. You just can't think like that. You have to do exactly what you want to do, which is the thing that you can do best. Then if nobody comes to see it, well, too bad, try again.

The two unproduced screenplays, are they just waiting for the right moment?

No, I'll tell you exactly what they were. One was about—this was about 1966, just after *Shakespeare-Wallah*—the girl, Felicity Kendal, coming to England and trying to get into acting. It was about how she got on and was in fact her story. It was at the time of 'Swinging London'. We brought in a lot of that, but of course by the time we failed to raise the money 'Swinging London' was over. And we got money for *The Guru* instead. Then, by the time we'd made *The Guru,* it was no longer possible. The other script was about spiritual groups in America. But by the time we didn't get the money for that, the spiritual groups seemed to be over. Anyway I think that Ismail was never really interested in that. If he had been . . . I think he really didn't like it much.

Have you any other New York film projects after *Roseland*?

I do write an awful lot for myself. The stories I'm now writing are all set in New York. That's how I get to know a place, through writing. I think that if I didn't write for myself, if I didn't do novels, I just couldn't do the screenplays. I wouldn't have, I don't know, the knowledge, the strength of background. Sometimes the two—writing fiction and screenplays—go on simultaneously; I try themes out, for instance *Autobiography of a Princess* and *Heat and Dust* were written straight after each other and the same themes were in my mind. The novels, of course, are just mine, but the films are Jim's. I think if I only wrote films I'd feel frustrated. It's only in recent years that a screenwriter gets mentioned at all. I know when I first started nobody even thought to mention me. None of the reviewers, I think, mentioned who wrote the screenplay of *Shakespeare–Wallah*. And I had written lots of novels by then. It's only in recent years that people say 'Oh, yes, somebody must have written the story.'

As I have always worked with the same director, I know more or less what's going to happen. They have made other films, but of course when they made a film in India I was the only person. Jim doesn't like working with amateurs. We had a lot of trouble in India, where it was very difficult to get good Indian actors who spoke English well enough. He took amateurs, and they were usually terrible. He is a director who really wants everything polished. He doesn't improvise. Something like the orphan choir in *Hullabaloo,* you know that's going to be there, you find them in every Indian town. It wasn't improvised. You know it's going to be there, just as you know a Howard Johnson's is going to be in Massachusetts. I don't discuss with Jim each day's shooting; in fact, I usually don't know what they are shooting. There aren't usually many major changes at this stage. In *The Europeans,* for instance, most of the changes that are made are due to the weather. The scenes that were to have been outside, I have to take inside, and that sort of thing.

You're working on *The Europeans* now; are you also working on something else?

While I'm writing a screenplay I do it all the time, and an original screenplay usually takes between two and three months, but now that my work is really finished and I only have to do bits, the bits I do mainly in the afternoons and in the mornings I do other things.

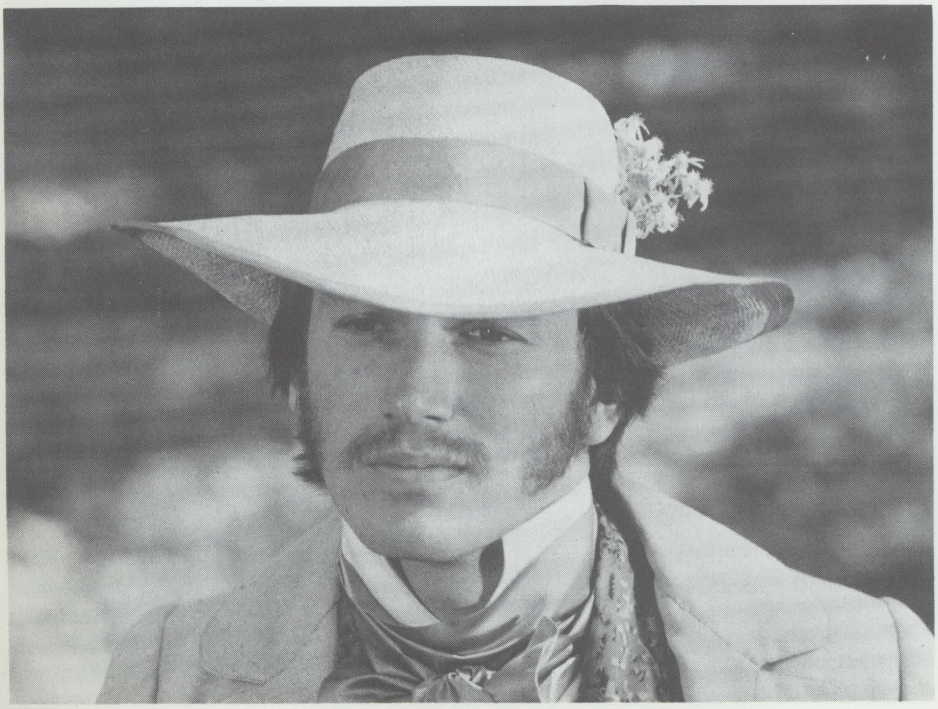
You try to sit down every day?

I don't try, I sit. I don't know what else to do. I don't put off—I know there are some who do—but I'm not like that. It's like practising the piano. I mean, if I played the piano I would play it every day, and know if I didn't play one day that I'd play worse the next. It's like that with writing. I think it was all those years in India that really got me into it, because I didn't have anything else to do. I didn't really know anyone outside my family, so I was alone the whole day. When I came out, I found that there was nothing else I wanted to do. Henry James was only an inveterate diner-out when he was young, afterwards he couldn't stand it. He used to have these visits from Edith Wharton. When he was younger he could take it, but later he would go crazy. She would swoop down and take him out in her big motorcar. He used to dread those visits. All he wanted to do was to get back home. I see that with other writers, too. After a time that's all they want to do.

I believe that Leon Edel cast his eye over your screenplay and pronounced it fitting, but that this carried no weight with the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington.

Did Ismail tell you that? Yes, Jim wrote to the National Endowment and asked them what projects they had approved, since they'd turned down Henry James. The projects were all by people who hadn't made any films at all. Then he asked for the reports of the committee on *The Europeans,* and they were all written by academics. They said, oh, *The Europeans* isn't a good novel. Literally one of them said that. ■

Tim Woodward in 'The Europeans'



James Monaco

THE TV NEXUS

We have been living with television in uneasy alliance for thirty years now. Only recently, however, have we begun to come to terms, critically, with this curious, evidently influential, sometimes frightening medium/art/industry/social force. Throughout the 50s and 60s, American television criticism was relatively low-grade, and essentially Manichean. In the popular mythos, TV was a shining force for Good. It brought bountiful quantities of information and entertainment to millions of people, and it did so, through the wondrous system of commercial advertising, apparently cheaply. It united us in a national (if not global) village to celebrate and mourn, and it forged a social network that was more than metaphorical. Intellectual critics, on the other hand, have generally tended towards the opposite view. For most serious commentators, TV is ultimately Bad. It's a 'vast wasteland', it rots the brain, it stifles cultivated conversation and social interaction, it teaches children the efficacy of violence and it's the prime cause of illiteracy.

The strength and constancy of this running critique of the medium is unique. In the 50s and much of the 60s, the censure of television could be attributed at least in part to elite intellectual attitudes towards popular culture. TV is clearly the most popular medium in the sense that it reaches more people, quicker, more often. So, while film for example was being grudgingly accepted in academic circles as an art, and PhDs were gingerly venturing into the foreign world of pop with iconoclastic encomiums to Bob Dylan and the Beatles, the boob tube remained a safe target for intellectual ire.

Yet in the late 70s, when we no longer make so many invidious distinctions between popular culture and elite culture—we've learned to treat them as parts of the same continuum—censure of television is escalating geometrically. Most recently, Jerry Mander's jeremiad *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television** has suggested that reform is futile; there's nothing else to do but cancel the entire medium outright. As an act of collective will, this would be unprecedented. It's very likely impossible, though Mander makes a surprisingly strong case for his position. (The title of the book is only partly hyperbolic.)

Like most of the new critics of TV, Mander focuses on the form of the medium and its effect on us rather than its content. This shift, in itself, marks a significant advance in the level of sophistication of television criticism. So long as analysis of the medium was devoted to programme materials, it was logically difficult if not impossible to develop an understanding of the true social and political context of television. If the programme is the problem, change the programme. This channel-switching approach was at best reformist. The growing interest in television-as-form, however, permits a radical interpretation, centred on the psychoactive nature of the medium. The title of Marie Winn's influential book *The Plug-In Drug*† is more than metaphorical. Most of the new criticism of television has about it the vague flavour of semiotics, which is certainly not surprising. Our attention has shifted from the signified to the signifier in the television sign, and that now enables us to begin to understand TV in context.

I'd like to suggest, however, that a second quantum jump is necessary. If the content of television is plotted on a horizontal axis, and the form on a vertical axis, then this third level in the development of TV criticism could be described as a calculus combining the two. Form and content don't exist separately in the medium, nor should they in our critical model of it. We need to investigate the *écriture* of television, as Roland Barthes might say: in other words, 'the relationship between creation and society, the language [of television] transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History.'

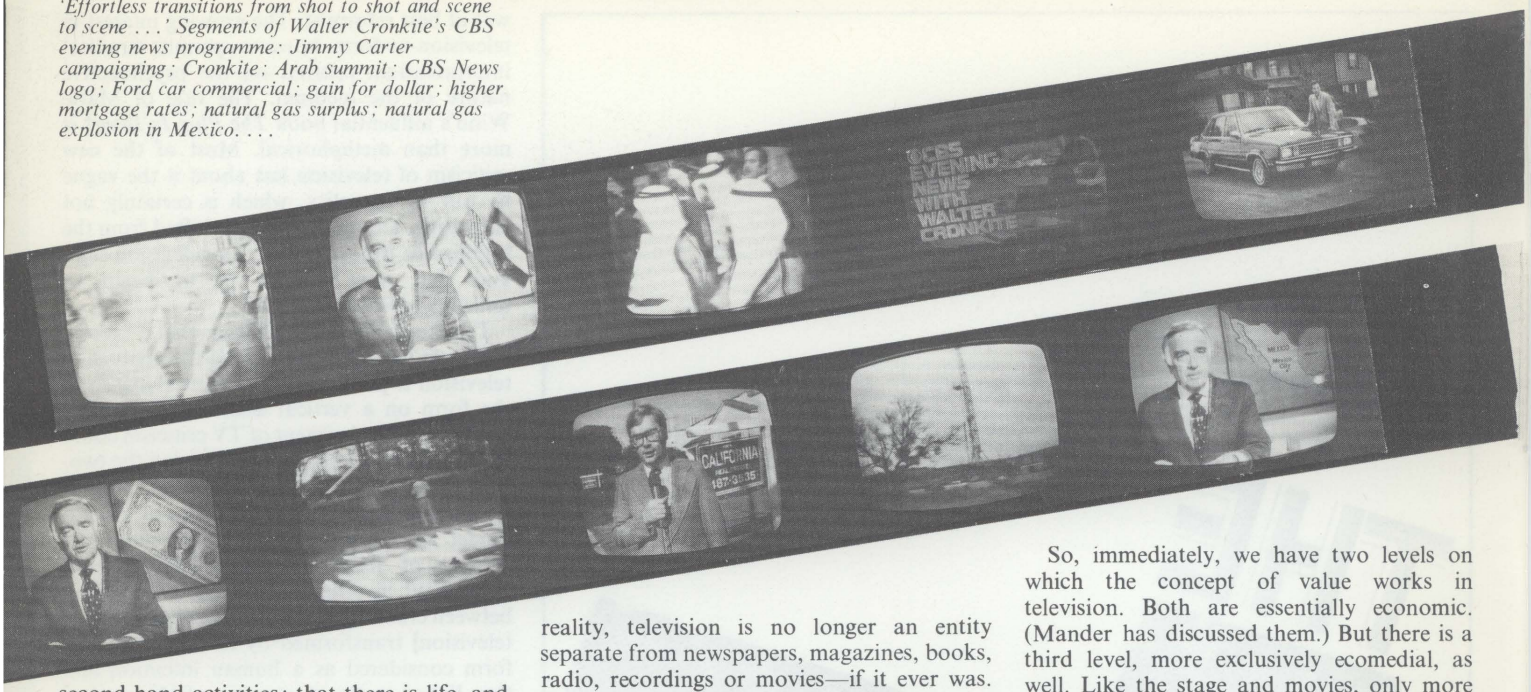
This pattern of the development of criticism isn't unique to television, of course. It has occurred in literary, film and art criticism—TV criticism is just a little behind chronologically. First we want to understand the significance of the message ('the moral of this story is . . .'); then we develop an interest in style and form ('the medium is the message'); finally we want to understand the human and social dimensions ('language transformed by its social finality'). We want to understand the *function* of television, in the broadest sense of that word, not only as a political instrument, or economic activity, or psychological force, but also as a transcendent model.

The first step here, it seems to me, is to stop thinking of television as one factor among many that go to make up the social equation. Talking about television *and* politics, television *and* children, television *and* advertising (to take three of the most common examples), forces an essentially misleading dichotomy. As the dominant medium of social expression, television is pervasive in a profound way that we seldom recognise fully. (Jerry Mander is on to this, although he doesn't state it explicitly. It's the reason the medium, in his view, is not salvageable.) Because most of us get most of our information about the society most of the time from television, it becomes the primary social fact of our lives. It doesn't simply mirror the society; in a way it *is* the society because it is such a powerful record of it.

This is true, in general, of all media (television is simply first among the various forms of information gathering, transmission and recording that we now use), and Raymond Williams—to my mind, the most important TV theorist now at work—has expressed this new view of the relationship between reality and the media and the rationale for it most succinctly. In *Communications*, he wrote: 'Many people seem to assume as a matter of course that there is, first, reality, and then, second, communication about it. We degrade art and learning by supposing that they are always

* *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, by Jerry Mander. William Morrow and Co., 1978.

† *The Plug-In Drug*, by Marie Winn. Viking Press, 1977.



'Effortless transitions from shot to shot and scene to scene . . .' Segments of Walter Cronkite's CBS evening news programme: Jimmy Carter campaigning; Cronkite; Arab summit; CBS News logo; Ford car commercial; gain for dollar; higher mortgage rates; natural gas surplus; natural gas explosion in Mexico. . . .

second-hand activities: that there is life, and then afterwards there are these accounts of it. Our commonest political error is the assumption that power—the capacity to govern other men—is the reality of the whole social process, and so the only context of politics. Our commonest economic error is the assumption that production and trade are our only economic activities, and that they require no other human justification or scrutiny. We need to say what many of us know in experience: that the life of man, and the business of society, cannot be confined to these ends: that the struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate, is a central and necessary part of our humanity. This struggle is not begun, at second hand, after reality has occurred. It is, in itself, a major way in which reality is continually formed and changed. What we call society is not only a network of political and economic arrangements, but also a process of learning and communication.' Williams is writing here more about the uses to which the media are put, but what he says holds true, I think, for the whole complex of uses and media.

Clearly, this reinterpretation of the function of audiovisual and print means of communication is in line with the great 20th century movement to picture the world not *in* language, but *as* language. It is just the next logical step to recognise that the channels of the expression of language are co-equal with 'political and economic arrangements'. Assuming we accept this new triad of the forces of reality, it might be useful to give the third thing a name. On the model of 'economy' (production, distribution and consumption of commodities) and 'ecology' (natural relationships between beings and their environments), let's call it 'ecomedia'. The jargon we use isn't important; what is important is that we start to recognise the equality between the powerful means of communication which we use and our economic and ecological (including political) models.

One advantage of the neologism 'ecomedia' is that it tends towards a singular usage ('media' is often singular in common usage now, anyway) and therefore forces the very real connections among the (plural) media. In reality, television is no longer an entity separate from newspapers, magazines, books, radio, recordings or movies—if it ever was. They are all united in a complex web of interrelationships, both economic and practical. The media *'is'* a sprawling, but unified, whole.

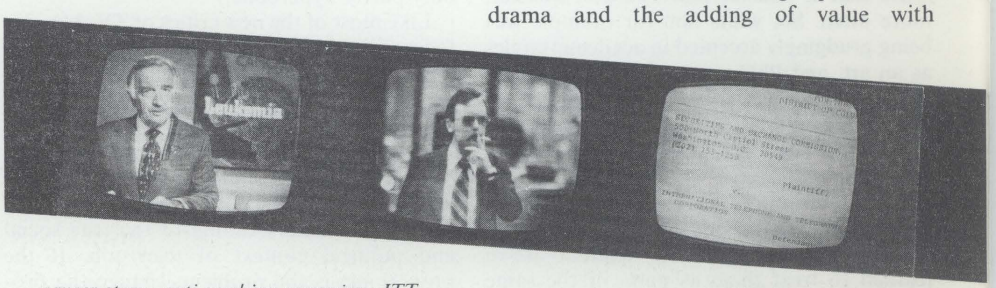
If ecomedia is of equal stature and range with, for example, economics, then we should expect some of the basic concepts of other types of human relationships to operate in the media, the necessary changes being made. Indeed they do. Take the concept of economic value, for example. The producer of a commodity adds value to the raw material he uses by transforming it into usable material: bauxite becomes aluminium sheet. This is a very simple idea. Television acts economically mainly by transporting images and sounds. In purely economic terms, the value added is that these 'commodities' are brought closer. (They are also packaged in seemingly more usable forms.) But what gives the images and sounds value in the first place? Entertainment and news have intrinsic value for most of us, but this basic quantity is multiplied considerably by the cultural values which television markets. Advertising creates artificial needs not only for consumer products but also for television itself as a social fact, and its programming.*

So, immediately, we have two levels on which the concept of value works in television. Both are essentially economic. (Mander has discussed them.) But there is a third level, more exclusively ecomedial, as well. Like the stage and movies, only more effectively, television gives value to its sounds and images by *dramatising* them. Raymond Williams has pointed out the remarkable nature of this dramatic transformation in historical terms. 'In societies like Britain and the United States,' he notes in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* 'more drama is watched in a week or a weekend, by the majority of viewers, than would have been watched in a year or in some cases a lifetime in any previous historical period.'

The effect of this vast inflation of the experience of drama can only be guessed at but, Williams concludes: 'It is clearly one of the unique characteristics of advanced industrial societies that drama as an experience is now an intrinsic part of everyday life, at a quantitative level which is so very much greater than any precedent as to seem a fundamental qualitative change.' Certainly the need for drama (or more generally for the artistic transformation of raw experience) is in part deeply rooted, psychologically. But it seems more than likely that the five or six hours of it now consumed on television alone by the average American household each day is the result of artificial inducement of need.

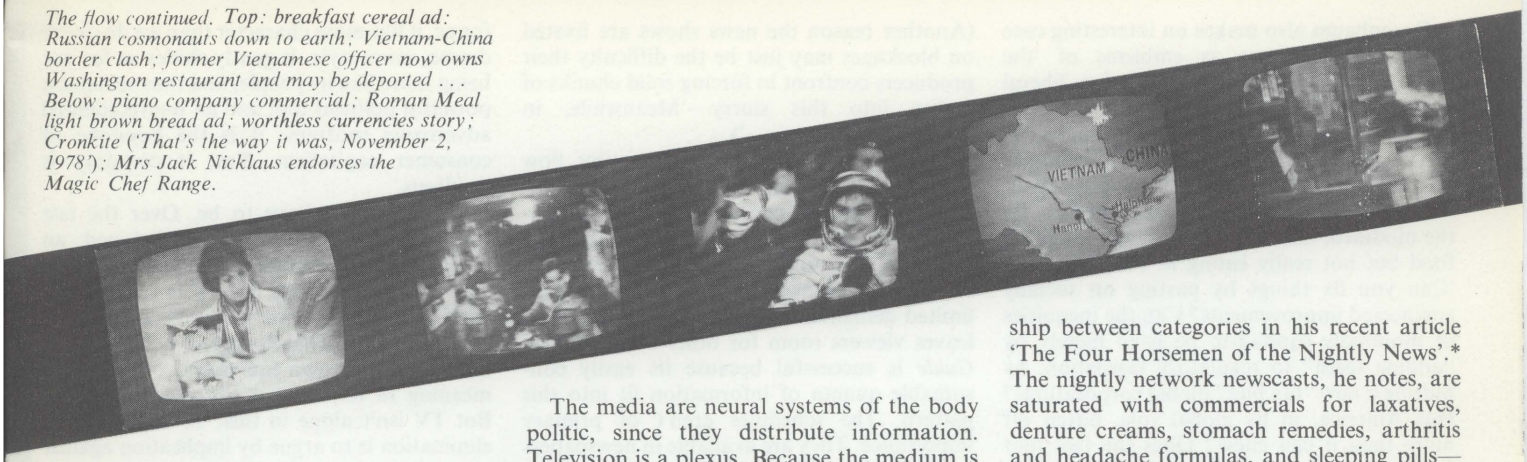
So we have the concept of value operating in several different ways in the structure of television. First as a simple economic fact: the transportation of the images and sounds has a real value for us and we are willing to pay for it. Second, in terms of the 'creative' economics of advertising, which induces a false need for the medium which can then be satisfied at a profit. Third, in purely ecomedial terms, value being equated with drama and the adding of value with

* The structure of commercial TV, in fact, is more complex. TV has a double economy. Except in the very limited case of cable, especially pay channels, neither the service nor the programming is being directly sold to the consumer. Rather the consumers, or their receptive attention, are being sold to advertisers.



. . . cancer story; anti-smoking campaign; ITT bribe case. . . .

The flow continued. Top: breakfast cereal ad: Russian cosmonauts down to earth; Vietnam-China border clash; former Vietnamese officer now owns Washington restaurant and may be deported . . . Below: piano company commercial; Roman Meal light brown bread ad; worthless currencies story; Cronkite ('That's the way it was, November 2, 1978'); Mrs Jack Nicklaus endorses the Magic Chef Range.



dramatisation. Finally, in a combination of modes two and three, as the very existence of the medium together with its own self-promotion creates an inflated need for the experience of drama.

There are, of course, numerous ways in which 'ecomedial dramatic value' affects the way we perceive reality. Life imitates art these days not only in content (how could it not? with the vast amounts of dramatic commodities being produced in the media, the odds grow better all the time that the plot has already been used) but also in form. The average American TV is turned on more than six hours per day. It's unlikely people are actually watching TV for that amount of time; nevertheless, when we exclude work time and sleep, simple arithmetic suggests that we spend more time experiencing television than reality. Naturally, during those relatively brief periods when we do enter out into the world on our own, we should expect things to happen the way they do on the tube.

We expect drama, it is what we are used to, and if we don't get it we perceive a lack. Reality is often disappointing. But luckily, actors in reality are learning more about their craft, a fact which is evident over the full range of experience, from the political demonstration (the French word, *manifestation*, is more precise) staged to dramatise ideas, to the human potential movement which helps us to become stars in our own right, better able to cope with the exigencies of our lifescripts.

None of this is really new. The dramatisation of everyday life began very early on with the advent of films and mass newspapers. Pirandello understood the dimensions of the new social structure; Brecht experimented with de-dramatisation. But, as Williams has noted, the quantitative change has, with television, become a qualitative change as well. In the economic metaphor, television creates value out of drama. But how precisely does it do so? To understand the structure of TV, perhaps it's best to switch to the biological metaphor.

The media are neural systems of the body politic, since they distribute information. Television is a plexus. Because the medium is more highly centralised than most, and because value in its system is essentially a matter of dramatisation and therefore singularly determined, TV exhibits an 'artistic coherence' (or uniformity of style) that is remarkable. TV distributes information, unlike other media, in discrete but carefully formulated quanta. We can categorise these quanta—news and entertainment, action and comedy, commercials, talk and sports—but the categories come after the fact. Structurally, they are all experienced in the same way, and the particular genius of television is that it has been able to integrate such seemingly disparate categories into a homogeneous whole.

Raymond Williams has analysed the distribution of television forms and come to the conclusion that 'planned flow is . . . the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form.' On the simplest level, that flow results in effortless transitions from shot to disparate shot and scene to scene, best evidenced in any newscast. (Williams' own example, from a 1973 San Francisco broadcast: 'Meanwhile, the Justice Department is considering legal action and it is very tense and touchy at this moment in Wounded Knee. *Still of French Château.* And in picturesque France Georges Pompidou is still President of the Republic . . .') On the succeeding levels, television flow gives us the art of programming a prime time sequence, with lead-ins and lead-outs, hummocks and hills; and the dominance of serials and series, time-slots and schedules, which stretch the flow beyond the borders of a particular day or week.

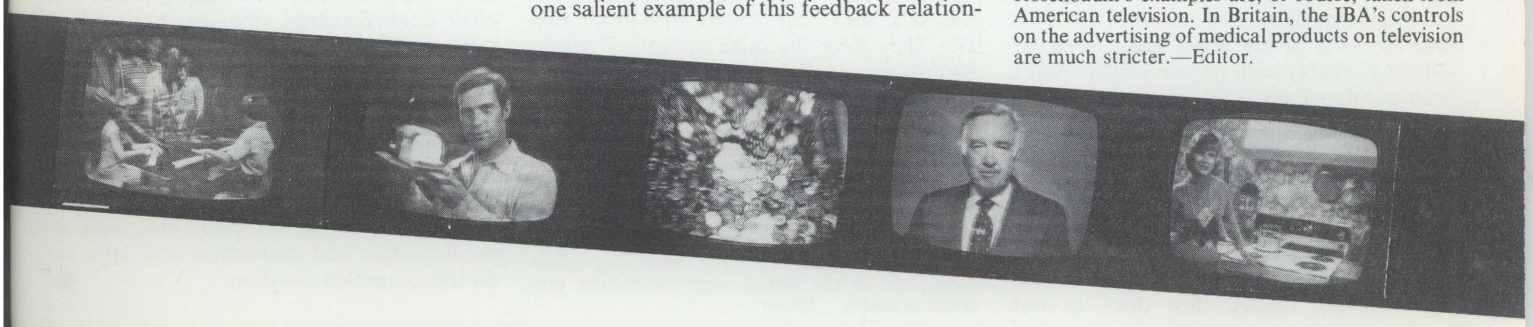
The flow obviously depends on breaking down information into manageable particles. This is the definition of homogenisation. The result is that we tend not to notice when categories are mixed. The voice that tells us about the vaginal deodorant spray has the same quality and form as the announcement that Georges Pompidou is still president. Moreover, the categories, as they become homogenised, tend to inform each other.

Ron Rosenbaum has brilliantly described one salient example of this feedback relationship between categories in his recent article 'The Four Horsemen of the Nightly News'.* The nightly network newscasts, he notes, are saturated with commercials for laxatives, denture creams, stomach remedies, arthritis and headache formulas, and sleeping pills—'dramas of bodily disintegration, of systemic failures, of the depredations and indignities of age, of the pain, suffering, and minutiae of mortality.'

The simple reason for this is that more than a third of all people over 55—the prime market for these products—watch the nightly network news. Demographically, these shows provide the most efficient exposure for such advertisers. The complex reason, in Rosenbaum's view, is that such commercials provide a 'reality check': behind the news, 'behind all these ephemeral dramas of institutions, the spectre of mortality stalks through the Pepto-Bismol and Dentu-Grip commercials, the skull beneath the skin of official news.' Older people watch the news programmes, not because they are more interested in news than younger people, but because they are more attuned to this underlying dramatic conflict, and the news itself provides them with 'the spectre of mortality', a drama in which they are more than a little interested.

Rosenbaum chose one week in early September 1977 for close analysis. The newscasts that week included commercials for Dentu-Creme, Ex-Lax, Arthritis Pain Formula, Primatene Asthma Remedy, Preparation H, Sominex, Nytol, Metamucil, Tums, Orafix Special, Rolaids, Geritol, Polident, Anacin, Pepto-Bismol, Fasteeth Denture Aid, among others. Meanwhile, the news stories covered that week included: Panama Canal Treaty signed, Senate passage in doubt; Bert Lance money-moving practices lead to resignation calls; progress toward Middle East peace conference blocked as talks stall; internal probe by Congress into Koreagate; strikes and work stoppages; Liddy paroled; Energy bill in trouble. The two lists are strikingly parallel. Almost all the commercials present images of blocked, constricted passageways, and so do the news stories. The body politic perfectly reflects the body commercial, at least in the nightly network news.

* *MORE: The Media Magazine*, March 1978. Rosenbaum's examples are, of course, taken from American television. In Britain, the IBA's controls on the advertising of medical products on television are much stricter.—Editor.



Rosenbaum also makes an interesting case for Denture creams as emblems of 'the traditional reformist solutions of a liberal democracy.' He points out that the classic denture drama mirrors Watergate morality: denture-wearer at a party . . . corn or apples offered . . . two choices . . . stonewall it, declaring he doesn't like corn or apples . . . go the modified, limited hang-out, accepting the food but not really eating it. He then asks: 'Can you fix things by pasting on socially engineered improvements? Can the inequities of monopoly capitalism be fixed merely by "adding teeth" to regulatory legislation, by putting a new "tax bite" on big corporations? Has America, in its global role, bitten off more than it can chew? Does the fact that Jimmy Carter's real teeth *look* like false teeth make us reconsider whether fraud is inherent in the porcelain or the person?'

The structure of television inherently produces this kind of interrelationship between categories. Constipated, arthritic, indigestible news stories attract a specific audience; that audience attracts a certain kind of advertiser; the commercials, to complete the circle, serve as models for the news stories, intensifying and sharpening the metaphor: a classic case of feedback. (The feedback itself fits the metaphor.)

There are numerous other ways in which the quanta of television interact and inform one another. It is a commonplace now that news and documentary materials are distorted to fit dramatic formulas, but the reverse is true as well: the rise of 'docudramas' reminds us that drama based on news is at a high premium. Commercials and sitcoms continually reflect each other, a situation that was parodied rather effectively in *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. Over the years, all these categories have been refined through a process not unlike natural selection to such a degree that we are now confronted with a homogenised model—perhaps even a replacement—for the life of the home. TV life is family life. From the Ricardos to the Waltons, from the *Father Knows Best* Andersons to the Bunkers and the Bonos, from avuncular Walter Cronkite to adolescent Hollywood Squares, family life is the prime formal force in American television.

This is true not only in terms of subject matter, but also, and more importantly, in terms of the *écriture* of television. The 'tube', the 'box'—a piece of domestic furniture—is integrated into the flow of domestic life like no other medium before it. Instead of taking our information and entertainment whole, at specific times and in specific places, we now absorb it continually, in a thin, processed stream. The elaborate 'meals' of books, newspapers, magazines and movies—over which we exert some control—have been replaced by the 'intravenous' steady diet of television (together with radio). This is the ultimate level of television flow: it merges indistinguishably with private reality. And it is able to do so, not only because it is always with us, but also because television structure has evolved in such a way that its discrete quanta are small enough to be linearised and therefore more easily injected into the flow of experience. In this respect, the operating medical metaphor isn't constipation, but rather the runs. TV is diarrhetic and diuretic. Its continual, diluted flow dries us out. (Another reason the news shows are fixated on blockages may just be the difficulty their producers confront in forcing solid chunks of reality into this slurry—'Meanwhile, in picturesque France . . .')

One good example of the way this flow theory works in practice is the success of *TV Guide,* which is one of the two largest-circulation magazines in the world. (The other is the structurally similar *Reader's Digest*.) TV is successful because it makes limited demands. It needn't be worked at. It leaves viewers room for other activities. *TV Guide* is successful because its easily consumable quanta of information fit into this pattern. The schedules aren't of primary importance. They are available in newspapers and free 'shoppers' publications. The articles are attractive, but this material, too, is available elsewhere. But the *Guide* is meant as a companion to the television experience. Even its pocket size permits readers to keep one eye on the set.* The recent success of non-books (experienced the way television is experienced) and mass-market paperback tie-ins with mini-series suggests it is only a matter of time before the *TV Guide/Reader's Digest* format is adapted to books designed to be read along with television rather than separately from it.

If television creates its own equivalent of value through dramatisation, then it creates its own meaning through a type of abstract personalisation. In general, people don't watch television shows, they watch television. This is part of the flow. More specifically, viewers are notably less interested in plot and information than they are in character and mood. The limited visual capabilities of TV don't lend themselves very well to the communication of detailed information. The discrete quanta structure militates against intricate plots. The domestic connection suggests a low-keyed approach to significance and a concentration on character/personality. In financial terms, this has proved a successful style in every area, from 'Happy Talk' news in which we are more interested in the reporters than in the events, to personality-laden game shows, to so-called situation comedies, in which the interest lies not at all with the situation but with the characters, the people.

We watch television to be with people—nice people, mildly interesting people, sometimes witty people. This is why newscasters are stars. This is why the talk show is the ultimate form of television. This is the reason for the success of nearly all entertainment shows from Jackie Gleason to Mary Tyler Moore, from *Father Knows Best* to *Kojak* and *Columbo*. The recent rise of static 'action' shows like *Charlie's Angels* is simply a refinement of the character approach into caricature. The aim of the Angels isn't to do anything, but to be. They pose, they walk, they talk, they wear clothes, they jiggle, they are. They have the same appeal as dolls—curious microcosmic reproductions that condense our experience of reality at the same time as they abstract it—and sometimes parody it. So the ultimate function of TV thus becomes surrogation. To a large extent, it replaces experience. It talks for us, it thinks for us, it has more character than we do, more drama, more style. It gently chides us for not being more like its people, and thus remains a powerful political tool and an unprecedented advertising medium: it is the keystone of consumer capitalism. Yes, it certainly is insidious.

But it doesn't have to be. Over the last thirty years television has developed an *écriture* best characterised by quantum flow. This is the way it has been able to integrate itself so effectively into the public life and our experience of it. That flow gives it the power it has to create its own equivalents of value and meaning in terms of drama and character. But TV isn't alone in this. To argue for its elimination is to argue by implication against all media, print and audiovisual. There's no doubt that television as a form has a measurable psychological effect which is most likely negative. It may even be physiological. But at least a part of this effect is inherent in the experience of any medium, even print.

Our aim shouldn't be to dismiss the medium out of hand. It is not going to go away. If it were outlawed it would simply create a generation of underground secret watchers. We lost whatever ultimate social control we have over the medium with the advent of videotape cassette marketing. What we should be doing as critics of the medium is giving people a measure of power to confront it intellectually and emotionally. First, we have to make it clear that the media are so pervasive that it is incorrect to assume that 'there is, first, reality, and then, second, communication about it'. The two are intimately related on a basis of equality. Then we have to learn to deal with television's inherent power to dramatise and characterise. In short, we have to develop a dialectical adversary relationship with the medium.

Television did not cause consumer capitalism, it just made it easier to construct a society built on waste and economic exploitation. If we can conceive of a society that redefines economic value in more human and appreciable terms, then there seems to me to be no reason why we cannot restructure television (and by extension the other media) so that value is predicated upon information instead of drama and meaning is the result of intellection rather than character.

Even as a surrogate reality, television isn't essentially evil. Our view of it as such depends on our own evaluation of reality, which is personal. Intellectuals and academics don't like to admit it, but there are significant numbers of people for whom Johnny Carson's nightly panel provides enlightenment, useful information and even political wisdom. To think otherwise simply betrays a profound lack of understanding of the way most Americans live. Putting Alistair Cooke (or Ralph Nader) in Johnny Carson's chair doesn't change anything in reality; it just provides a different surrogate.

Clearly, television isn't going to change until its matrix, society, does. Ecomedia works in tight conjunction with economics and ecology. But until that happens, we can begin restructuring the medium so that it is easier for us to deal with it objectively. The flow has to be interrupted, and with it dramatisation and characterisation. How to do this is another question. ■

* The same arguments apply, with only minor variations, to the British mass circulation programme guides.—Editor.

PARIS FESTIVAL

'L'Hypothèse du Tableau Volé': human statues in an overgrown garden

Gallantly attempting a degree of glamour, the fourth Paris Festival opened with a dressy if eccentric affair dedicated to Jeanne Moreau. A pot-pourri of pop songs, sketches and readings (a Chaplin imitation; Brigitte Fossey reading extracts from *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*) followed its somewhat under-rehearsed course. After an assortment of Moreau clips, the lady herself appeared, sang one song in English ('Always'), was kissed by everyone on stage, and vanished into the night.

After this, the festival could only improve. Coming at the end of the year, Paris can garner the work completed too late for the summer festival round, most profitably seen this time in a special section on the New German Cinema. The best of the German films, Wolfgang Petersen's **Black and White Like Day and Night**, follows through the simple proposition that dedicated chess playing leads inevitably to madness. It begins with a small boy biting the hand of the opponent who has just beaten him; growing up (and now played by Bruno Ganz), he develops an obsession about beating the reigning Russian champion, displaying all kinds of paranoia along the way and even blowing up the table with a time bomb. Petersen lets his theme develop its own cool logic and even finds a way to make the chess board visually interesting, employing a slowly tracking camera (no zooms) which creeps around the players and glides over faces, clocks, instruments. Ganz brilliantly conveys the mania of the long distance chess player, which finally leads him to the antiseptic hell of a psychiatric ward.

Several of the films shown at Paris are also on show at the London Festival; another, **Perceval le Gallois**, which to many critics seemed sad evidence that even Eric Rohmer can err, will surely turn up soon in Britain. This report is therefore confined to films at present without British distributors. From Poland, Feliks Falk's **Top Dog** is a tough satire about a con-man fighting to get the job of master of ceremonies at a ball. Jerzy Stuhr is chillingly convincing as the oily, insinuating operator, continually on the move, picking up a drink or a sandwich on the way, always on the phone to a new and generally willing contact, and with a nice line in mock honesty when dealing with superiors. Matching his hero's mobility with a free-wheeling camera, Falk keeps him in sharp focus throughout as the film scratches away at the underbelly of Polish society. Only the telegraphed denouement disappoints.

The most intriguing item from a selection of new French films, Raoul Ruiz' **L'Hypothèse du Tableau Volé**, is also the most difficult to describe. An art collector introduces a series of paintings by Tonnerre, housed in a *Marienbad* style of mansion, and proceeds to discuss why they caused a scandal in their time by reconstructing details from them in the form of human tableaux, posed mainly in an overgrown garden and looking as if James Barrie had just passed by. Droning away in the best pedagogical manner, the collector interrupts and contradicts himself and goes off into literary comparisons, while the human statues blink or smirk occasionally as if to emphasise their play-acting roles. A rather bookish joke, perhaps, but Ruiz never allows it to become quite as absurd as it sounds, opting instead for a bland, if convoluted, recitation which seems to be guying not only art documentaries but the very kind of cinema we are watching.

Sándor Sára's **80 Hussars** is an anecdote from 1848, describing how a Hungarian regiment stationed in Czechoslovakia decides to desert and return home. As the men trek across mountains and treacherous rivers, personal dissensions are revealed amid the speculations on loyalty, exile and sacrifice which—since this is a Hungarian film—extend beyond the confines of the period setting. The director is also his own cameraman, and the images leap and swirl like some animated battle painting. But the film demonstrates again the difference between great camerawork and a valid camera style; here, Sára's method of slowly zooming to and from a group of faces soon becomes wearisome.

Chantal Akerman's **Les Rendezvous d'Anna** looks like an attempt to make a commercial film after the more private preoccupations of *Jeanne Dielman* and *News From Home*. We travel with a woman film director (Aurore Clément, looking dreamy) as she passes through European capitals, meeting friends, mother and husband on the way. As before, Akerman shows herself to be a fine observer of city nightscapes: lonely hotel rooms and corridors with discarded tea-trays, and the mysteries and ennui of train journeys through the night (there is a hypnotic sequence shot from a window as a train moves slowly into Brussels Central). Unhappily, these brightly lit *morceaux d'atmosphère* are interwoven with long, melancholy 'confessionals' from all the characters, couched in repetitive banalities which suggest a significance they cannot sustain. The film won a prize from one of the

several juries for *mise en scène*, an announcement which got a more than stormy response from the closing night audience, though the diminutive Ms Akerman almost quelled it with a boxer's salute and a knowing smile.

More audience participation at the screening of **Ecoute Voir . . .**, by the Argentinian émigré Hugo Santiago, in which Catherine Deneuve as a mannishly dressed private detective dealt out karate chops to an accompaniment of whistles and hoots. As it happens, this is Deneuve's best performance in years, and the film is an intriguing mixture of pulp and politics and spectacularly made into the bargain. Over to Gilbert Adair.

JOHN GILLETT

Ecoute Voir . . .

With *Ecoute Voir . . .* Hugo Santiago reinvents cinematic baroque. No neon lighting, no Luna Park, no gilded mirrors to pass through (in this film a mirror is just a sheet of glass in which one coldly confronts one's features after being beaten up), but laser rays, microwaves, ultra-sounds, the whole magic box of modern electronics, spilling across the Panavision screen in dizzying abundance. It is sounds, in fact, as much as the camera's sinuous tracking shots, that articulate the filmic space: sounds raised and lowered, speeded up and slowed down, turned on then, abruptly, off; sounds echoing hollowly along the damp corridors of a sixteenth century château or, in the soundproof dungeons of another château, the huge nocturnal fortress of Beaubourg, cut, edited, filtered and mixed by an alchemist and his apprentice.

Through this audiovisual maze, and with only an obsessive little ritornelle as guide, Claude Alphand—a detective and, oddly enough, a woman—moves alone, like the famous one uncorrupted man who walked down the mean streets of Chandler's novels. And if in this film, at moments, these same dark streets, these same rain-streaked pavements may be glimpsed, complete with mysterious aggressor at every corner, they constitute here a kind of halt, a moment of respite, almost of nostalgia.

Ecoute Voir . . . (the title is a rather archaic button-holing idiom which might be translated as *See Here . . .* or even, if one attempts to approximate the declaration of intentions implicit in the original French, *See Hear . . .*) is the third feature by Hugo Santiago, an Argentinian based in Paris since 1959, when he became Bresson's assistant. His first two films were both written in collaboration with Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, the author of *Morel's Invention*. *Invasion,* made in Argentina in 1969, about the invasion of an unspecified city (Buenos Aires) by an unspecified commando, provided a gloss on the mechanics rather than the politics of a *coup d'état*. In fact, for the European spectator at least, it was primarily a film about the city itself, invaded, as by Godzilla, by a tentacular paranoid fiction, its graceful plazas and avenues (with Ricardo Aronovich's black-and-white photography going easy, as they say in American diners, on the white) inexorably caught in the net of a terrifying shadow.

This was followed, in 1974 and in France, by *Les Autres,* roundly booed as the official French entry at that year's Cannes Festival. I saw *Les Autres* too long ago to offer any extended account of its virtues or defects, but the main problems as I recall were an ill-judged overture, subsequently cut from commercial prints, in which a 'musical' montage prefigured the themes of the film (but this was way back when the Parisian intelligentsia was *en pleine déconstruction*); an ear-piercing soundtrack; and, above all, an almost purely literary conceit of a script dealing with the ambiguity of identification. Since Santiago (as he is the first to admit) is of a rather theoretical cast of mind, a script that is equally theoretical can only result in narrative and *mise en scène* inclining indigestibly in the same direction.

His latest film was also written in collaboration: with the noted French novelist and critic Claude Ollier. But Ollier has studied the field of popular fiction (he wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma* the best text ever on *King Kong*) and in *Ecoute Voir . . .* genre and formal parameters set up an immediate dialectic, the light, witty dialogue being counterpointed by a 'heavy', pyrotechnic visual style. It is a somewhat puzzling rule of *films noirs*, accepted without question even by the public at large, that plot-lines must be complicated; and that of *Ecoute Voir . . .* is, as usual, unusually so. Indeed, in one of the film's rare self-regarding ironies, its minor characters spend much of their time on-screen arguing over the precise sequence of events in recognisable classics of the genre which they presumably saw on television the night before; and if *Ecoute Voir . . .* proves successful, similar conversations will doubtless take place concerning *its* plot.

This involves an infernal machine invented by Arnaud de Maule, a mildly diabolic aristocrat (played by Sami Frey with that sort of charm commonly styled 'disarming' and which instantly puts one on the defensive) and the intrigues of a sect of Oriental origins and international ramifications, the Church of the Final Renewal, to divert it to its own sinister purposes. The machine, lodged in the vast pigeon-house of de Maule's château, can, by emitting microwaves through their radios, condition the unsuspecting inhabitants of a local village to the point where they turn into zombies deprived of speech and memory. In the end, however, both de Maule and the sect are foiled by the film's feminine hero Claude Alphand, private detective, crack-shot and a dab hand at karate (Catherine Deneuve resplendent in trench-coat and soft felt hat).

If this sounds preposterous, it is intended to (and not just by me). Naturally, Santiago and Ollier distance themselves from their narrative confection, but in a manner diametrically opposed to that of Truffaut or Godard when adapting material that was hardly less preposterous. Here the genre is mined from within. *Ecoute Voir . . .* boasts a beginning, middle and end in that order and manages to generate a fair amount of suspense along the way. What is at stake in the film is the control of information and therefore of personality, a matter of no small importance to us all: on both occasions when the village radios are violated it happens during news broadcasts.

And if, in Truffaut's *La Mariée était en Noir,* Jeanne Moreau's eponymous harpy was never meant to be more than a crude icon—as in those fairground booths where one is photographed as a boxer or toreador, she gave the impression of having stuck her head through a cinema screen on which *Marnie* was being projected—Deneuve plays Alphand (the surname would seem to be mandatory for her character) with what can only be called Bogartian sincerity. We are invited to *believe*. The Paris Festival audience tittered whenever she bested some strong-arm bully boy, which is a pity, as she performs these capers with immense grace, jerking back her beautiful hair to adopt the classic kung fu pose.

As I have suggested, such reversions to popular story-telling iconography function as the nostalgic echoes of a period when, in the cinema at least, good and evil were encased in simple monochrome symmetries; they recall, in a very different context, the poignant shots of Sacré Coeur and the Eiffel Tower as reflected in the glass and steel structures of *Playtime*. But they are also, superficially, what *Ecoute Voir . . .* is all about: a strong woman. Alphand is neither a dupe nor a victim, nor yet the sort of feisty victim that passes for a liberated woman these days. By far the most sympathetic person in the film, able to out-shoot, out-think and out-manoeuvre her male adversaries, she is presented as the complete professional, a Hawksian hero rather than a Hawksian heroine.

It has often occurred to me that the material textures of Hawks' overtly virile universe were (especially by 70s standards) scarcely less seductive and feminine than those affected by Sternberg. Where the latter, as everyone knows, had a thing for furs, feathers and lacy veils, the former, by decking out his protagonists in beaver-trimmed aviator jerkins, suede gloves negligently gripping slim pearl-handled pistols, made them all as elegant as Van Dykes. There is a satisfying rightness about seeing such accessories now, for the first time, around a real woman, and one who takes visible pleasure in their contact. Only in one aspect does Deneuve come across as more Bacall than Bogart: it is she who flirts, who seduces. When she pays a second visit to his château, for example, climbing in through the window, de Maule remarks with almost wistful cynicism that, in the neighbourhood, she is already taken for his latest conquest. 'Et si,' she coolly replies, 'c'était vous qui étiez ma conquête?' Out of respect for the genre Santiago and Ollier demand that Alphand be not only admired but *identified with,* specifically by the male sector of an audience; which is, perhaps, what provoked those uneasy first-night giggles.

As befits her name, Claude Alphand is also bisexual. Placed perfidiously at the beginning of a paragraph, that little phrase acquires an emphasis rigorously denied by the film. *Ecoute Voir . . .* is not *about* bisexuality. It treats what is still a ticklish theme as if, like nudity, it were already a commonplace of contemporary cinema, a fictional unit among others. We are first made aware of it when, on de Maule's advice, Alphand enlists the help of Flora Thibaud (Florence Delay, ex-Carrez, ex-Bresson's Jeanne d'Arc), a producer at the Maison de la Radio, to penetrate the headquarters of the sect by organising a documentary on its activities. But the two women are old acquaintances. In the tiny recording studio they scrutinise each other dispassionately. Unpleasantries are

exchanged. A shared past is raked up, mutual affection no more skilfully masked than mutual scorn. 'Josiane?' 'On s'est perdue de vue.' Later, 'Salope!'

Flora, it transpires, is being blackmailed by the sect to encourage de Maule's collaboration with them; her lover (and his), a pretty 17-year-old actress, Chloé (Anne Parillaud), is their drugged, half-willing prisoner. During the broadcast Alphand rescues Chloé and whisks her off to the château to recuperate. There, in the film's one explicitly sexual scene, she and Chloé come together in a long, slow kiss, the camera restlessly circling them Hitchcock-wise. De Maule enters, stares at them. Cut. All three are in bathrobes around a table laid for breakfast.

Every positive, 'natural' approach to deviant sexuality within the limits imposed by commercial film-making runs two main risks: (a) excessive proselytising and (b) that lesbianism, for example, or the *ménage à trois* is set up, with conscious or unconscious cynicism, for the more subtle titillation of jaded male voyeurs. *Ecoute Voir* . . . skirts both of them at once by the easy, unoppressive discretion of its treatment, at antipodes to the kind of self-righteous 'chastity' that is the bane of so much post-*Emmanuelle* French cinema. Here bisexuality is the very essence of the protagonist's strength and completeness. While Flora is a rather triste lesbian and Chloé is a cipher, Claude Alphand cannot be stereotyped for the simple reason that bisexual stereotypes have yet to be invented.

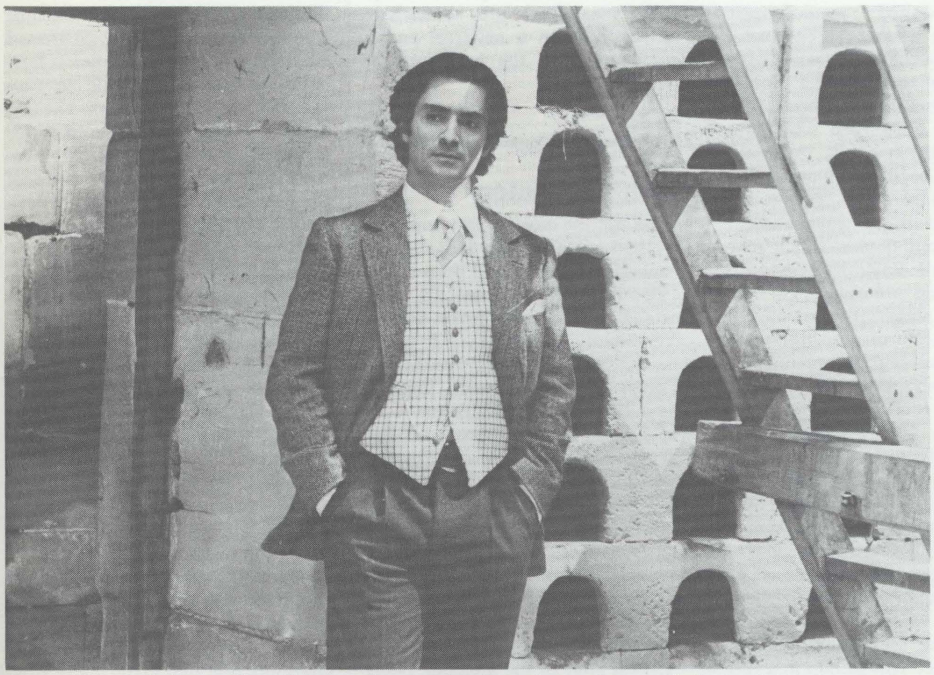
Critics often cite the shower murder in *Psycho* as a case of powerful audience reaction being induced by purely technical/aesthetic means: the real cutting-up of Janet Leigh, we know, was done during what must have been terrifying sessions at the editing-table. If the overall tonality of *Ecoute Voir* . . . is extremely dark, almost tragic at the end, it is entirely due to the film's virtuoso visual style and astonishingly dense stereo soundtrack. The experience is of an auditory 3-D. When de Maule conducts Alphand on a tour of his château, the sounds of their footsteps and conversation 'track' along with the camera; when she clambers in through the window, the resonance of her voice alters at the precise moment that she crosses the ledge; and the sound of a dog barking far off in the village seems to come from outside the cinema itself. But these would scarcely rise above the status of gimmicks (equivalent to the daggers thrown in our faces during *House of Wax*) were sound and image not interrelated throughout in complex and endlessly shifting patterns.

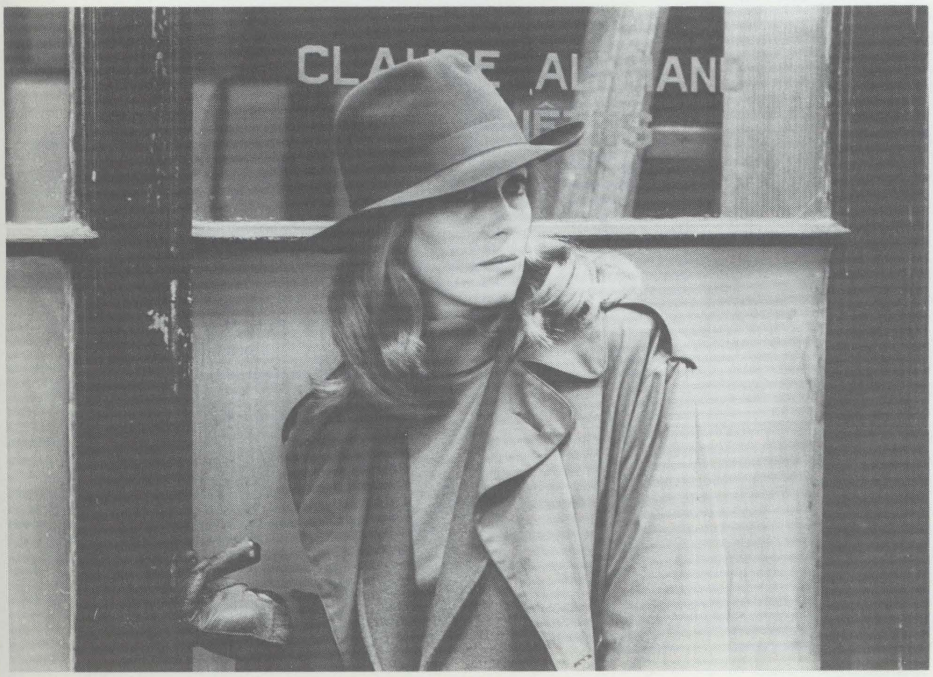
One instance will have to suffice: Alphand is wakened from sleep by a telephone call. We gather from her clipped responses that there has been an accident, but why or to whom we are left unaware. Now, in a long *plan-séquence,* we are on the Seine freeway, just in front of the Maison de la Radio. As she squabbles with a boorish sergeant (her relations with the police are naturally on the same footing of cordial loathing as Philip Marlowe's) we hear, off-screen, an unidentified grating noise, as of a crane. The camera pans over to the river, from which a car—Flora's—is being hauled. Alphand starts to theorise aloud about how the 'accident' might have happened. From Flora's pathetic pile of belongings she picks up a handbag, whose clasp we know to conceal a minuscule tape-recorder. Later, in her own car, she plays it. Over Flora's desperately weary voice cluing her in as to where the solution to the mystery may be discovered, we begin to hear on the tape the ominous rumbling of a lorry as it bears down on the doomed car. Finally the soundtrack is 'filled' with an unbearably protracted, nerve-shattering crash. Without a single *image* of Flora's death, we know—and feel—exactly how it happened.

But almost all the film's essential information is conveyed to us through sound and, more particularly, through the harshly evocative textures of mechanically reproduced sound. The pervasive ritornelle is both the theme music of Flora's radio plays and a code for the sect; in Alphand's apartment, by a disorienting reversal, miscellaneous café rhubarbing forms a new kind of Musak; her interrogation of Chloé from a soundproof booth in the Maison de la Radio is cruelly punctuated by the necessary turning off and on of console switches. And in the extraordinary penultimate scene at the Centre Pompidou the conversation that definitively establishes Flora and de Maule's complicity with the sect is split up on enormous stereo speakers, like the two outer sides of a triptych whose central panel would be the heart-rending distance separating individuals in a mechanised world.

By thus privileging one cinematic code over all the others, *Ecoute Voir* . . . verges constantly on the *fantastique* (that of *Orphée* with its descent into hell and, indeed, its ham radio), which in the end it espouses. The knot tightens, space is contracted, three décors telescope into one. De Maule races frantically along the corridors of the château straight into Chloé's apartment, from there directly to a showdown behind her office with Alphand, who now returns along the same corridors to the château and out into the pigeon-house (a magnificent 'find' by Ollier in the village of Maule and the inspiration of the scenario), where she destroys the infernal machine. Then walks away, alone, down the mean streets of a sixteenth century château in the Yvelines.

GILBERT ADAIR





'Ecoute Voir . . .' Above: Sami Frey standing by the pigeon-house. Below: Catherine Deneuve

In The Picture

Orchestral Rehearsal

Hailed by *La Repubblica* as 'Fellini's first political film', *Prova d'Orchestra* (*Orchestral Rehearsal*) was previewed last October at no less a venue than the Quirinale, seat of the President of the Italian Republic, Sandro Pertini, who warmly applauded what Fellini refers to as a 'Filmetto' or a 'Special'—his first film made exclusively for television. Shot in 16 days in an exposure studio at Cinecittà, lasting one hour, with deliberately vacuous and derisive music by Nino Rota, and made on a budget 'no more substantial than a restaurant bill', *Orchestral Rehearsal* appears at first sight to be exactly what its title suggests.

'I've had it in mind for some time,' Fellini explains, 'to portray an orchestral rehearsal. Every time I've had occasion to assist in musical inserts in my films, I'm always fascinated, astonished and even somewhat moved observing how out of a series of rehearsals, complete with chattering, irritations and personal problems, in an atmosphere of confusion and disorganisation, it's possible to bring fifty or sixty people into participating, each at a precise moment, in the abstract, mathematical and totally harmonious discourse which is music.'

The musicians arrive in dribs and drabs at a small, smoke-filled bar adjacent to the rehearsal room. They order coffee, beer and sandwiches. 'There's a sleepy, noisy, school classroom atmosphere,' says Fellini, 'halfway between a union protest meeting, a jury gathering and a sightseeing outing. They talk about the cost of living and what they had for dinner the night before. Rather than any story lines there is just their conversation, which just about amounts to the same thing.'

The intention of this 'Special'—'at least the original intention,' Fellini adds, tongue in cheek—'was to recount the transformation of the members of the orchestra. We have seen them at work, indifferent and hostile, weighed down by routine, gossiping and arguing, childishly overbearing, arrogant and drowsy. And now, through the exertions of their job, the acceptance of limitations, working together punctiliously, meticulously and obstinately under the guidance of the conductor, these same members of the orchestra are transformed, as if by a magic spell, their foreheads glistening with perspiration, eyes glued to the score or the podium, into something quite beautiful, at one with their instruments, united in the expression of a hard-won harmony.'

Fellini's description of the film's intentions belies somewhat the political resonances of the final result. The long-awaited 'magic spell' doesn't come about, the conductor blows his top, the union representatives interrupt to demand a 'double break' because the instrumentalists have been disturbed by the conductor's harsh words. After the break, things begin to fall apart. The room turns into chaos, graffiti has been scrawled on the walls, and the musicians shout slogans which echo round the hall. Portraits of Mozart and Beethoven are splattered with mud and the rehearsal erupts into an orgiastic oratorio of obscenities, the plebeians rehearsing the uprising. An enormous demolition ball suddenly appears and smashes the walls to smithereens. The instrumentalists then gradually re-emerge from the rubble and resume their positions. The conductor howls, 'Da capo, signori!' and the rehearsal continues.

Visually, Fellini regards the film as a study of faces, and he has used no well-known actors for his fictitious documentary. For the role of the conductor, he tracked down the owner of a face sent to him in a tiny photograph from Holland some four years ago. This operation led to what Fellini describes as 'one of the most clamorous examples of the mystery of photogenia, perhaps the most exciting in more than thirty years' work.' The photogenic Dutchman was 'a catastrophe, the least musical creature in the world, an olive tree would have done better.' But once the cameras started rolling, 'my maestro was perfect, stupendous, the most masterly maestro of all maestros. It was the most movingly apt face for a conductor, suffused with the vibrant fanaticism of one invested with the superior and unimpeachable quality of being a conductor.'

In the prestigious context of the Quirinale, watched by Pertini, Andreotti and the director and staff of RAI, *Prova d'Orchestra* took on the air of a satirical fable, a cartoon allegory of the malaise in Italian politics, illustrating the impossibility of a discordant, politically heterogeneous government functioning harmoniously, while determined to keep up the formal appearance of doing so. 'I didn't want to make a political film,' Fellini demurs, 'it's more of an ethical apologue. What I was after was for anyone seeing this film to feel somewhat stricken, as if by an illness.'

Orchestral Rehearsal is scheduled for Italian television transmission shortly. Fellini claims he never watches television, or rather, that he doesn't even know which knob to press to turn it off when his wife leaves it on. How, then, does he approach this unfamiliar medium? 'The "filmetto" is halfway between an interview and a confession—these seem to me the chief characteristics of the intimate and colloquial language of television. As far as lighting was concerned, I had to forget about the cinema. Cinema lighting is rarely reproducible in television, and when it does occur it runs the risk of altering and distorting what's being projected. In television you can't allude or suggest or try to achieve a more emotional, unconscious rapport with the spectator. Everything needs to be seen clearly and closely. Which means we are somewhere halfway between a newsreel and a documentary on the behaviour of insects.'

TONY MITCHELL

Alien Encounter

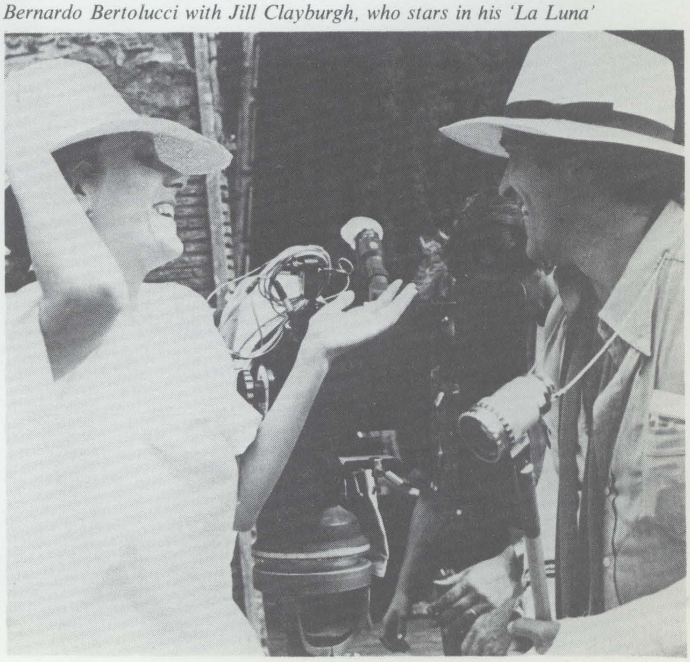
In the hottest days of last summer, they had constructed a labyrinth at Shepperton Studios, and deep inside it was Ridley Scott, compact, red-bearded, in an Enigma jacket and an accent lightly recalling Tyne & Wear. The setting, once you reached it through cluttered, curving tunnels, was a blazing white anteroom with Ian Holm, looking about as distracted as it's possible to make Ian Holm look, pacing at its centre. As Scott perched contemplatively on a giant camera, a script-girl murmuring exchanges of dialogue beside him, a section of the wall slid apart and two armoured figures lurched through, bearing a stretcher. The Alien's invasion had begun.

On the spur of the moment, Scott decided on an extra shot of this fateful encounter. His performers, Tom Skerritt (from *Big Bad Mama* and *The Turning Point*) and Veronica Cartwright (who has grown up from being Rod Taylor's tremulous young sister in *The Birds*), steamily allowed themselves to be encased once more in space-suits decorated with coralline knobs and sprayed with a mist of water like indoor plants. Several tunnels away, the flight deck of the U.S. commercial starship *Nostromo* was a litter of beer-cans, oriental pin-ups, comics and *Confucius* magazines. Next door, the hold of the starship was by contrast the size of a Greek temple, with monstrous metal pillars and a vista of impossible vehicles. The skeleton of a helicopter could just about be identified at the heart of one construction, but the other occupants of this giant parking lot were indecipherable; they shone with an obscure and disturbing beauty, patently immovable, misleadingly purposeful.

Extracted from his labyrinth, Scott talked about *Alien* with the enthusiasm you'd expect from someone who had been entrusted with around ten million dollars to produce a box-office success comparable to *Star Wars* for 20th Century-Fox. The first thing to make clear was that this would be an altogether tougher film. Although the exact appearance of the Alien itself was intended to be a closely guarded secret, hidden from everyone including Fox executives, word had already got out of a scene in which the creature bursts bloodily from a man's chest. It is, said Scott, a film about terror that happens to be set in space but could have been anywhere in an isolated location where a group of people faces the unknown and the uncontrollable. The story, dreamed up by Dan O'Bannon of *Dark Star* fame, and not too many light-years away from the beach-ball subplot of that film, is of the discovery of a new and lethal life-form on a distant planet, and of its eradication of its discoverers one by one.

Scott's background, discounting a charming first film made many years

Bernardo Bertolucci with Jill Clayburgh, who stars in his 'La Luna'

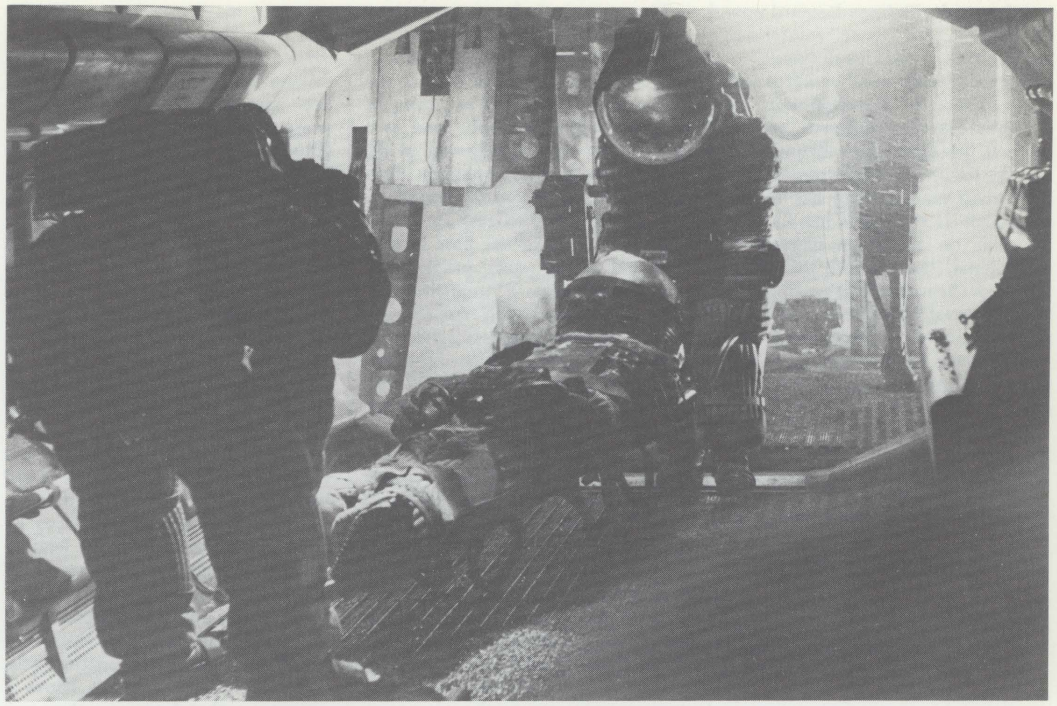


ago for the BFI's Experimental Film Fund, *Boy and Bicycle,* was as the designer of innumerable BBC plays and the director of some of the most successful television commercials ever created. His first chance at a feature came with *The Duellists,* received with caution by British critics but with lavish enthusiasm by the French. The script for *Alien,* developed by David Giler and Walter Hill (director of *The Driver*), came to him out of the blue and, he says, knocked him flat. 'It was definitive, totally direct, and did its job in that it was terrifying, straight off the page.' But it contained one major problem: the Alien.

'Who *is* the Alien? Whenever you get to the monster in a horror film it's a big let-down, everyone has a good laugh and that's it. All the atmosphere bursts like a bubble. There was no way I could approach the film until I had an extraterrestrial creature that we could, so to speak, live with.' Part of the answer, it seemed, was to have *several* Aliens—the thing grows like some tropical insect through a series of metamorphoses. But the secret of the creature's appearance, and linked with this the whole disconcertingly visceral appearance of the film's settings, proved to emerge from 'The Necronomicon'.

Science fiction fans whose tastes extend as far back as the 1920s, and the first editions of a pulp magazine called *Weird Tales*, will speak to you in whispers of the dreaded 'Necronomicon' and of its fabled creator, the Mad Arab Alhazred. His chroniclers have included H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Bloch, but the contents of his appalling texts have never been disclosed until the Swiss artist, sculptor and one-man happening H. R. Giger fearlessly arranged for the book's simulated publication in the godless era of the 1970s. Giger's artworks centre on the concept of the 'Biomecanoid', a fusion of the organic with the mechanical that puts Wells' Morlocks back in the Dark Ages where they belong. His paintings depict the erotic, obsessive embraces of literally self-possessed hermaphrodite beings tethered, plugged into, or growing out of the coils, pumps and tubes of a technological nightmare. These couplings are witnessed by phalluses with warty infant faces, and serene foetal spectators. 'Through Giger we found our Alien. It is very special. Terrifying and yet quite beautiful.'

But there had, of course, been other contributions. The spacesuits, for example, were originally designed by one of the artists from the French comic for adults, *Metal Hurlant,* plus some ideas from Japanese samurai films adapted, not too surprisingly, by one of the Oscar winners from *Star Wars*, John Mollo. One of the more abrasive American political cartoonists, Ron Cobb, had designed the starship interiors, with contributions from *Star Wars* veterans Les Dilley and Roger Christian, and from Ridley Scott himself. Before anyone else got to work on the film, Scott drew the whole thing in storyboard form. 'Storyboard is very valuable to me because it's like writing the script, and provides an overall conscious pattern—the style emerges as you work. Each scene is like an embryo, and then the film on top of that is another embryo.'



'Alien': 'Two armoured figures lurched through, bearing a stretcher'

The control room of the *Nostromo* had filled with smoke, which it seemed was just how Scott liked it. 'Smoke mutes the colour and creates a three-dimensional sense. It creates planes, slightly accentuates the depth. But it won't,' he added hopefully as he vanished into thick fog, 'be visible on the screen.' His departure was witnessed by the distracted figure of Gordon Carroll, producer for *Alien,* whose previous exploits include *Cool Hand Luke* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.* Somebody had just called him from Los Angeles to discuss Alien spin-offs. 'They were talking about *Alien* bathsoap and *Alien* beachwear,' he said. 'Christ knows what kind of a film they think we're making. . . .'

PHILIP STRICK

Parallel Life

Good news for fellow-travellers in the Borgesian labyrinths is that Jacques Rivette and Eduardo de Gregorio, who collaborated on *Céline and Julie, Duelle* and *Noroît,* have both been busy recently. Rivette has been editing *Merry Go Round* (which de Gregorio co-scripted), and de Gregorio has just completed shooting for his second film, *L'Envers du Sommeil* (in which Rivette plays a key role).

Merry Go Round is not part of the *Scènes de la Vie Parallèle* series, which ground to a temporary halt when the third part to be filmed collapsed during shooting and the fourth proved too expensive to finance. Meanwhile, Rivette decided on a thriller interlude arising from a request by Maria Schneider to make a film with him, and which altered course during filming to emerge as what sounds as though it might well become a fifth *Scène de la Vie Parallèle.*

In New York and Rome, a man and a woman who do not know each other (Joe Dallesandro and Maria Schneider) each receive a summons to the same mysterious assignation in Paris. No one turns up at the rendezvous, and their contact—his girl-friend, her elder sister—proves to have disappeared in sinister circumstances, possibly kidnapped. They duly set out on the trail of a dark conspiracy, filmed largely with a subjective camera; not quite so systematically as in *The Lady in the Lake* (there are objective shots and sequences), but along the same lines and designed to shade the atmosphere of mutual suspicion into a kind of fantasticated terror.

Originally, the idea was for the couple gradually to rediscover their childhood in the sort of regression planned, but never finally realised, for *L'Amour Fou.* Instead, their fear now creates a sort of parallel universe, and the suburban surroundings of the thriller, 'the dangerous, sad city of the imagination', gives way to a natural world (sand dunes, a forest) into which they each project the other and where they are assailed by hounds à la Zaroff, snakes, a medieval knight, and suchlike terrors of the mind. It sounds one hundred per cent Rivette, and absolutely fascinating.

L'Envers du Sommeil is the same but very different. A complex political thriller, it started out, as de Gregorio says, from a curious contemporary phenomenon: 'Edgardo Cozarinsky and I started thinking about the story of *L'Envers du Sommeil* after reading some statements by a French newspaper proprietor. Not only did he not hide his sympathy for the Occupation government during the Second World War, he also half-jokingly minimised his prewar political activities, stating that he *only* waited at the doors of Jewish-owned companies to slap the employees on their way out.'

'We were struck because, only five years ago, nobody would have dared to make such declarations through the media. This sensitised us to the almost daily discovery of newspaper items about the coming-out of war criminals, who no longer seem to feel the need to hide their record. But although the screenplay deals with History, it does so from the viewpoint of a particular history—our own as Argentinians who were brought up under Peronism and, at different moments, decided to leave a country called Guarana in the film.'

A UNESCO interpreter (Nathalie Baye) is putting together a dossier on a writer who was killed in a car accident after a long stay in South America. During the course of her researches she finds the widow's diary, and realises that the writer (Jacques Rivette—who else?) was working on a book about Nazi war criminals still living in free hiding. Suspecting that the car accident may have been no accident, she starts to investigate.

Since she herself has a vague guilt (her parents bought Jewish property cheap during the Occupation), and the young man who helps her (Philippe Léotard) even more so since his parents were rich O.A.S. activists who died in a plane accident which may have been no accident, ambiguities proliferate as they uncover three mysterious missing men who may or may not be war criminals, and who may or may not be one and the same person.

If it sounds a little like *Mr. Arkadin,* this is not entirely fortuitous, since de Gregorio and Cozarinsky took *The Mask of Dimitrios* as their model, knowing that the film itself would emerge very differently. 'My first choice in casting the "villain", who under different identities reappears throughout the film as a phoenix-like incarnation of fascism, was traditional: a kind of Dorian Grayish, suave George Macready type. When Helmut Griem was unable to meet the schedule after agreeing to play the part, I rethought the film and decided

to take a risk. Philippe Léotard now also plays the three mysterious missing men in various disguises.'

The flashbacks, in other words, are now subjective, manifestations of Nathalie Baye's suspicions as she projects her discoveries through her feelings for the ambiguously charming young man helping her in her researches. 'I think this has focused the film on the main characters' obsessional side, on both their deep hatred of their historical prey and on the difference of their own motivations for the hunt. I discovered then that *L'Envers du Sommeil* deals with parents, children, and a legacy of guilt.'

Paranoia is alive and well and living in Paris.

TOM MILNE

Travels with a Donkey

Gavin Millar recently directed a film on Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Travels with a Donkey' for Thames Television. Stevenson's journey through the Cevennes was made just a hundred years ago.

The writer of the *Observer's* TV Preview column advised his readers, two days before the transmission of *Travels with a Donkey*, that it was a film equipped with everything 'except R.L.S.'s sensibility and his marvellously supple, singing prose.' Setting aside the initial stumbling block, that he hadn't seen a foot of the film or talked to any of its makers about it, it has to be granted that we were unable to deploy the great man's sensibility during the shooting period, coming as it did some 84 years after his death. On the other hand, we had gone out of our way to work in a bit of the old supple, singing prose, and the question of whether and how this works is one that preoccupies documentary filmmakers constantly.

There seems to be no point in a film about a writer, especially such a writer as Stevenson, if you cannot convey at least a flavour of how the words on the page work as a thing of beauty in their own right, and as a medium for the transmission of the writer's character and opinions. Both these endeavours *can* be served by film, but it is just as easy to do the opposite: to make the film so self-confident in its own graphic expressiveness that it implicitly devalues any prose which tries to poke its nose in. Stevenson is a writer who poses particularly acute problems here, because he is so vividly pictorial and sensuous. It is hard to fight against reproducing his pictures:

'It was perishing cold, a grey, windy, wintry morning; misty clouds flew fast and low; the wind piped over the naked platform; and the only speck of colour was away behind Mount Mézenc and the eastern hills, where the sky still wore the orange of the dawn. It was five in the morning and four thousand feet above the sea; and I had to bury my hands in my pockets and trot. People were trooping out to the labours of the field by twos and threes, and all turned round to stare upon the stranger. I had seen them coming back last night, I saw them going afield again; and there was the life of Bouchet in a nutshell.'

Stevenson isn't referring immodestly to his own description but there, indeed, is the life of Bouchet in a nutshell. In the event we resisted the slavish reproduction of this scene, however tempting; even though our documentary was not a period dramatisation, it would have been easy to echo the scene in contemporary pictures. What would have been the point?

The question arose more pressingly in a section describing RLS's approach to the village the evening before. There is a comic description of a confused meeting with two peasants, mother and son, when he was lost. Then one line: 'The road smoked in the twilight with children driving home cattle from the fields.' We ignored the two contentious peasants. But this smoking road I couldn't resist. It seemed to be the image that would seal the long day's march (his first). I found a cart-track between low-walled meadows waving with hip-high grasses and wild flowers. The spire of Bouchet's ugly church poked invitingly up on the horizon half a mile away, lent enchantment by the misty distance. We corralled some cows due to be driven home down that very track. In charge of them were two little children...

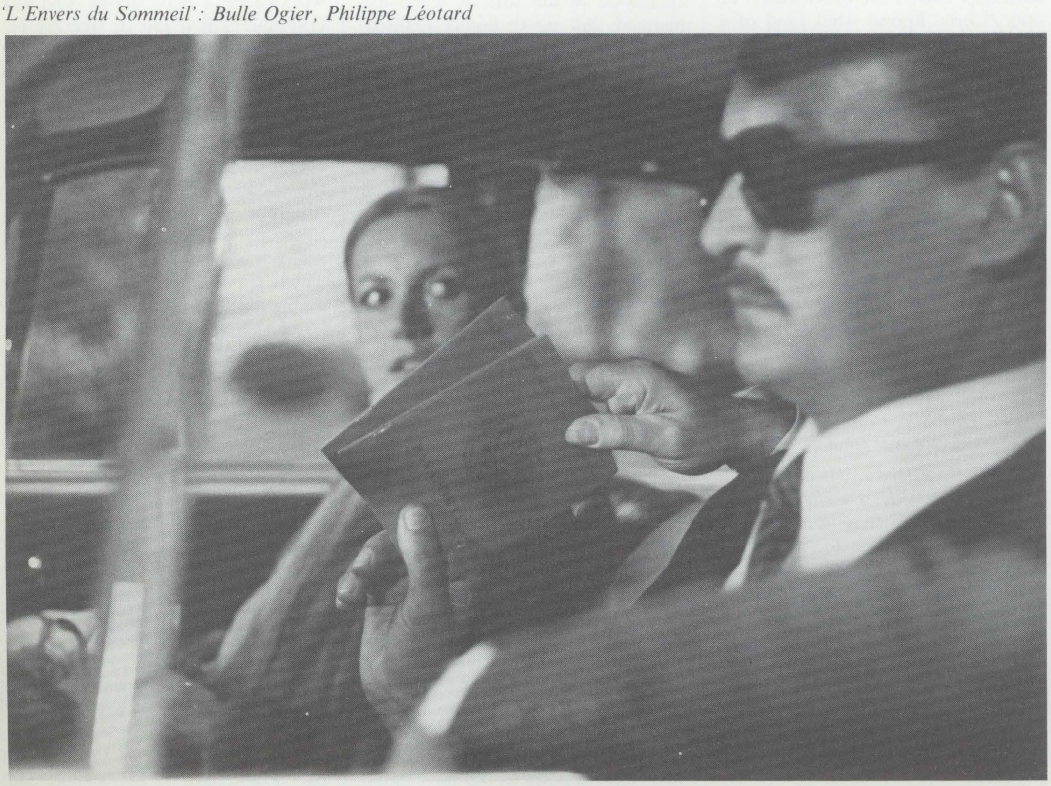
The question then arose: should we include RLS's line in voice-over? Would it enrich his prose to see it visualised? Of course not. Does he become a better writter for lending himself so aptly to the camera? Of course not. What are we doing then, apart from giving pleasurable recognition to the force of his verb 'smoking', and its conjunction with twilight? I honestly don't know. I cannot say that I am *sure* these are real problems, either: it's just that they worry me.

An easier outcome was found to the famous chapter 'A Night Among the Pines', where Stevenson's writing takes off into a sphere that it had hardly approached till then. For the first time he positively enjoys sleeping out under the stars, and all his senses seem to be, even for him, unusually alert. He talks of 'a stirring hour', long before dawn. 'When that hour came to me among the pines, I wakened thirsty. My tin was standing by me half full of water. I emptied it at a draught; and feeling broad awake after this internal cold aspersion, sat upright to make a cigarette.'

If we avoided having the prose read here, and simply showed our actor, John Castle, emerging blearily from his sleeping bag, drinking and lighting up, we thereby also missed the enjoyable squirt of Latinism—'aspersion'—that RLS loved to slip in among the Anglo-Saxon bluntnesses. One solution to that was to have Castle draw attention to his eclectic prose stew. RLS's voice (read by Brian Cox) tells of a bad moment on the road when 'suddenly, in the midst of my toils, the load once more bit the dust, and, as by enchantment, all the cords were simultaneously loosened, and the road scattered with my dear possessions.' We could say that this was a curiously early (1878) use of the old cowboy phrase, biting the dust, but we didn't feel confident enough to go on and point out the wit of mixing that with the biblical hints of loosened cords. In the long run, 'A Night Among the Pines' became a simple record of Castle and Modestine smoking and munching by lamplight and firelight while swathes of RLS were read by Brian Cox. There were many who felt that that, the simplest strategy, was the best of all.

GAVIN MILLAR

'L'Envers du Sommeil': Bulle Ogier, Philippe Léotard



Asian Festival

Despite its long and somewhat chequered history—it was founded in 1954—the Asian Film Festival has remained resolutely off the main festival circuit. In 1978, however, the festival was held for the first time outside Asia, in Sydney, with support from the Australian Film Commission. Cultural chauvinism being what it is in this part of the world, the festival caused hardly a ripple. Australia's involvement was not, of course, purely altruistic; and its initiative in securing the venue was largely by way of gently drawing attention to local post-production facilities, seen as positing an alternative to South East Asia's traditional sources of technical expertise, Japan and Hong Kong.

A block of well concealed screenings of local product apart, it was possible to see some thirty-five features from seven Asian countries. India sent only one feature, and Hong Kong's participation was marked by the effects of some fairly fraught local politics. Nevertheless, visitors were given the rare chance of seeing side by side films from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia, at a time when economic conditions generally are forcing these industries into positions of new self-consciousness (more and more countries are establishing protective legislation to support the local film industry against the twin wedges of Hollywood and the Asian majors like Hong Kong and Japan).

The festival's runaway success was probably the Japanese *Melody in Grey*. About the initiation of a young blind child, Orin, into the celibate company of itinerant *goze* (blind women singers) and her subsequent expulsion for a sexual transgression, Shinoda's film follows with unflinching singleness of purpose the girl's initially platonic liaison with an army deserter and then with another expelled *goze*. The downward trajectory of Orin's life and the unlaboured simplicity with which it is evoked

'Travels with a Donkey'

inevitably recall Mizoguchi. The early sections are especially impressive, with Shinoda revealing a powerful sense of visual organisation in, for instance, the eerie, dreamlike sequence when the sightless women feel their way through their household tasks, or, vowed to celibacy as they are, earn their living singing what appear to be suggestive drinking songs to gatherings of male carousers.

Equally assured is Li Han-hsiang's *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Shown as one of three films from Hong Kong, the film confirmed both the distinctiveness of the Chinese cinema and Li's leading position (along with King Hu) within it. Li suffered somewhat locally from critical comparisons with a re-released 60s mainland version of the same opera —mistakenly, I feel, since while the earlier film pretends to be no more than a painstaking record of a stage performance, Li's version is nothing if not stylish and cinematic. It may be lightweight—the opera tells of a thwarted love complete with *Camille*-like death-bed sequences, within an ambience of almost ethereal refinement—but it is never insubstantial, and it elegantly transmutes this refinement into idealised tragedy.

The festival's biggest surprise was the unmistakable confidence and consistency evinced by the half dozen or so Philippine entries. If melodrama is the governing genre here, it is melodrama played without the claustrophobic intensity of this cinema's Taiwanese counterparts, or the stern, almost militaristic moralism of some of the Korean variants on view. *Moments in a Stolen Dream* seems to touch most of the generic bases with its wealthy semi-college setting and a narrative spun round a dilatory vacation romance; but it operates in rather a different register, with a welcome degree of self-assurance and a decidedly light touch. It is director Mike de Leon's second feature, and he keeps the film clear of the excesses present in, for instance, his colleague Elwood Perez' *My Brother My Wife*. De Leon has ambitions which are spelt out in his earlier, and less commercial, *Rites of May*, but in common with other Philippine directors he faces a daunting prospect in attempting to realise these ambitions within the limitations of the country's alarmingly stringent censorship.

Thailand's offerings included Surasri Phatham's *Rural Teacher*. The story of a college graduate who quits the lure of westernised life in the city for the simple rewards of teaching in a village school, the film tends quietly to sidestep the incipient melodramatics present in the script, which, in common with many of the films at this festival, seems to offer a straight polarisation between exemplary and deviant characters. Phatham's decision is underscored by the film's quiet, unassuming mode of observation. The other Thai films were more generic. *Bar 21*, for instance, would have been more successful had it done without its interlarding of sub-Brechtian, semi-*West Side Story* song and dance fantasy sequences within its starkly unmediated tale of a young bar girl who lapses back into the life when hopes of marriage to the student she has been supporting through college eventually fail. The ingenuousness of the central performance and the directness of observation embody the film's social content more or less by default.

VERINA GLAESSNER

Torre Nilsson Remembered

I first met Leopoldo Torre Nilsson on my first visit to a film studio. A group of high-school boys who had shown an interest in films had been invited to spend a day at the old Argentina Sono Film sound stages, which were holding out quite gallantly in 1954, when *Graciela* was shot. Two years before *La Casa del Angel* was made, and three years before it attracted an international audience at Cannes, Torre Nilsson was already known at home as a film-maker to be reckoned with, a brilliant, impatient, daring young man. A few months earlier I had seen *Dias de Odio*, based on a Borges short story, and for a 15-year-old in his first term of film society attendance, the film was the most exciting ever made in Argentina—proof that, on native ground, you could work imaginatively with sounds and images, ellipses and voice-over. . .

For me, this proved to be a die-hard delusion. Torre Nilsson (the son of a prolific, occasionally very interesting director, active between the 1930s and the late 50s) had been his father's assistant since the age of 13, long before he published his first book of poems or made his first short film. Between 1957 and 1963, when a liberal cultural policy allowed a short-lived attempt at an independent, energetic Argentine production, he was already a young master, a few but decisive years ahead of the directors that came up around 1960 and saw their careers variously obstructed by economic and political upheavals. None of them, true, showed as much talent, energy and professionalism as Torre Nilsson, whose films of the period, from *El Secuestrador* to *Piel de Verano*, from *La Caída* to *La Mano en la Trampa*, are a body of work unique in Argentine film history.

As the years went by, Leopoldo and I became friends, with shifting periods of closeness and distance. When I finally dared to try to make films myself, in Argentina it was only possible to touch upon certain subjects, and to do so with a certain language, by staying clear of the industry. But at the time it was still possible to go underground—there were not yet plain-clothes intelligence men at the laboratories. I made *Dot Dot Dot* with Leopoldo's 35mm Arriflex, which he lent me in 1970 and early 1971, when the film was shot. He was engaged, then, on a series of large-scale historical epics. We used to have breakfast together twice a week and, seeing him fight obstacles of a different nature from those I faced, I learned to respect his capacity to enjoy his work, his will to make the best out of materials which were not the closest to his sensibility.

A few years later he achieved a series of films not inferior to those of his best-known period, wild melodramas like *Los Siete Locos*, *Boquitas Pintadas* and *Piedra Libre*, in which he conveyed, the more strikingly because indirectly, the destructive forces at work deep in the heart of Argentine society. By then I had already settled in Paris, where I last saw him in 1976, in a film studio far removed from the imposing décor of our first meeting—a small *plateau* on the rue de Lourmel, in the 15th *arrondissement*, where I shot the scenes from *Danton's Death* included in *Les Apprentis Sorciers*. I noticed his arrival during a rehearsal, and when I approached him in the ensuing break he greeted me with 'You see, I return your visit . . .'

He went back home, where censors and government officials lavished false promises and ever-renewed red tape on his last project, which never materialised—a film on the yellow fever epidemics in Buenos Aires, around 1870. (Were they aware that Camus' *La Peste*, coming out during the occupation, had been read as a topical parable?) Now that he is dead I cannot remember him but as a happy man. His sense of humour, his taste for American fiction, his passion for gambling, his rejection of Peronism (even when latter-day opportunists tried to make it look fashionably left-wing), his love for his friend, scriptwriter and wife, the genial Beatriz Guido . . . all the things that made him dear to me come back now without sadness, with a warm immediacy that is very much alive.

EDGARDO COZARINSKY

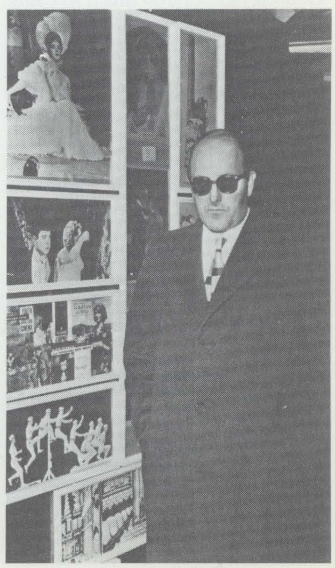
Family Portrait

One of the few films at the 1978 Edinburgh Festival to live up to the festival's tradition of presenting the most stimulating examples of recent independent cinema was Alfred Guzzetti's *Family Portrait Sittings*, an exceptional example of the group of films which have been referred to as 'personal documentary'. This important section of 1970s American independent film-making, little of which has been seen in this country, also includes such films as Dick Rogers' *Elephants*, Amalie Rothschild's *Nana, Mom and Me* and Martin Scorsese's *Italian-American*, all concerned with the film-maker's own background.

Guzzetti's film traces his family history from his grandparents' emigration from Italy to the present day. One of its starting points, he told me, was the existence of large quantities of home movie footage shot by his father. 'If you saw enough of that footage, you could start to see a million subtle relationships. You could see when a chair was re-upholstered. And that means something, it means it's after World War Two and you can buy that kind of material and people have jobs again, there was more money.'

The problem was to make such connections evident to the ordinary spectator. 'You needed all sorts of contexts and signs to point to what was significant, and I thought there was a way of giving that context that would energise these home movies.' His solution was to structure the film chronologically—which he had not originally intended—and juxtapose his father's footage with interviews with members of his family, presented partly in sync sound and partly in voice-over, still photographs from the family album and other material such as shots of

Leopoldo Torre Nilsson at the NFT



Italian streets. 'The idea was to make a film which could find an audience that was sophisticated in film and also an audience that was not, that would look at the content of it.'

Family Portrait Sittings succeeds admirably on both counts. In terms of content, its account of Guzzetti's family history is lucid, fascinating and surprisingly lively. I was particularly attracted to the interviews with his parents, who disagree, interrupt and sharply correct each other. But the film is also of considerable formal interest. (For an extended analysis of this aspect, see William Rothman's article in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, February 1977.) In particular, Guzzetti introduced a deliberate contrast between the form of his father's home movies and that of his own footage. 'I wanted to find a relationship in which, in the image, the film-maker is the son of the father who shot the 8mm images. It means both a continuity and an opposition.'

The sections of the film shot by Guzzetti are black and white, using static tripod shots and long, slow pans; his father's footage is in colour and consists of hand-held shots following the movements of members of his family. Particular events appear as images in the father's footage, and the verbal description accompanying them assumes the status less of a commentary than an alternative account.

The separation of sound and image implied here is central to Guzzetti's approach. It was for this reason that he delayed the introduction of sync sound until about 25 minutes into the film and retained the camera blips. 'I wanted the idea to predominate that the film was composed and put together and that when you got to the sync, it wasn't a natural mode from which the voice-over was a departure but a deliberate join of the sound and image that was held together by this visible sync mark.'

This approach is undoubtedly related to the fact that Guzzetti came to film through theatre and music; an early short, *Air* (1971), contains some very elaborate experimentation with the use of sound in which 'the image is thought of and composed as an additional voice.' He also acknowledges a debt to Godard. 'Godard has done so much to define the set of problems. Not just single-handed, but he has articulated problems and so laid them out in film after film that his body of work is inescapable. The relation of fiction to documentary, the place of narrative, the importance of sound, what you can do with the problem of realism in film. A lot of Godard's work concerns the relation of sound and image, and particularly the acknowledgment of the status of the image as an image, how that can be made to mean something to the spectator.'

The final section of *Family Portrait Sittings* shows the family in the present day. The juxtaposition of the home movies with Guzzetti's own footage is neatly rounded off in a sequence showing his own son's first birthday party, which brings together footage filmed by Guzzetti of his father filming with his 8mm camera and footage filmed by the father of Guzzetti using his 16mm Arriflex. It is in this section that Guzzetti most clearly demonstrates his rejection of the element of escapism that has marked some of the films produced since American independent film-makers began to step back from the intense political activity of the 1960s to examine their own personal situations. The family speaks about its political views, which are revealed to be surprisingly radical.

Guzzetti emphasises that presenting the family in the world and their views on American society after the long chronology of their past history was a structural decision. 'It was a way of phrasing the question "Where do these ideas come from?" For me, that's the central question of the film.'

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

1978: Obituary

DECEMBER '77: Raymond Bernard, veteran French director (*Le Miracle des Loups, Les Misérables*); Michael Bates, British character actor specialising in officious policemen (*I'm All Right Jack, Clockwork Orange*); Leila Hyams, versatile blonde ingénue (*Ruggles of Red Gap, Freaks*); Cyril Ritchard, Australian-born musical comedy actor who made occasional film appearances (*Blackmail, Half a Sixpence*); Jacques Tourneur, director (*Cat People, Out of the Past*); Risto Jarva, Finnish director (*Time of Roses*); Charles Chaplin; Howard Hawks.

JANUARY: William Girdler, young American director (*Grizzly, Day of the Animals*); Damia, French singer who appeared in films in the 30s and sang the 'Marseillaise' in Gance's *Napoléon*; Sally Eilers, silent star, mainly in Hoot Gibson cowboy films; Ernst Waldbrunn, Austrian director who also acted in post-war Pabst films; Jack Oakie, comedian, Mussolini in *The Great Dictator*; Austin Trevor, British character actor (*Alibi, Red Shoes*); Leo Genn, actor, often cast as army officer (*Henry V, Moby Dick, The Wooden Horse*); Tim McCoy, actor in innumerable Westerns; Charlotte Greenwood, American actress/dancer who specialised in eccentrics from 1918 to *Oklahoma!*: Oscar Homolka, actor whose crumpled face and beetling eyebrows stole many a scene, from *Sabotage* to *Funeral in Berlin*.

FEBRUARY: Wendy Barrie, actress in British films of the 30s (*The Private Life of Henry VIII*) and later in Hollywood (*It Should Happen to you*); Derrick de Marney, British actor and producer; Ilka Chase, columnist who made cameo appearances on screen (*Now Voyager, The Big Knife*).

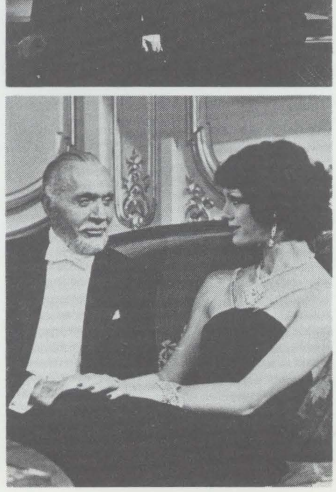
MARCH: Micheál MacLiammóir, distinguished Irish actor, Iago in Welles' *Othello*; Peggy Wood, American opera singer who played character roles (*The Sound of Music*); Wilfred Pickles, radio actor, typecast in films as amiable Yorkshireman (*The Gay Dog, Billy Liar*); Maggie McNamara, American leading lady in 50s films (*The Moon Is Blue, Three Coins in a Fountain*); Charles Vanel, veteran French actor (*Wages of Fear, Illustrious Corpses*); Philip Ahn, Korean-born actor, typecast in Hollywood as Japanese officer; Leigh Brackett, screenwriter (*The Big Sleep, Rio Bravo, The Long Goodbye*); Leslie Fenton, British actor who played tough guys in early Hollywood talkies (*Public Enemy*) and later directed thrillers and Westerns; John Cazale, saturnine actor, memorable as Fredo in *The Godfather* and Al Pacino's psychotic partner in *Dog Day Afternoon*; Jack Hulbert, lantern-jawed light comedian (*The Ghost Train, Bulldog Jack*).

APRIL: Robert Vas, Hungarian-born director of notable television documentaries (*My Homeland, Nine Days in 26*); Donald Gray, British actor (Korda's *Four Feathers*), best remembered as Mark Saber in eponymous TV series; Will Geer, American actor (*Seconds, The President's Analyst*), Granpa in *The Waltons* TV series; Basil Dean, co-founder of Associated Talking Pictures, producer, director (*The Constant Nymph, Lorna Doone*) and Head of ENSA; Valeska Gert, German dancer, actress and cabaret star whose career spanned Pabst (*Joyless Street*) to Schlöndorff (*Coup de Grâce*); Frank Tallman, leading Hollywood stunt pilot (*Catch 22, The Great Waldo Pepper*).

MAY: Goffredo Allessandrini, veteran Italian director; Sy Bartlett, American screenwriter and producer (*Twelve O'Clock High, The Big Country*); Bernard Borderie, French director, mainly of glossy costume dramas; Bruce Geller, American writer and TV series producer (*Rawhide, Mission Impossible*).

JUNE: Bob Crane, American character actor, best known as Colonel Hogan in *Hogan's Heroes*; Emmy Lynn, French silent star (*Mater Dolorosa, J'Accuse*); Jean Yatove,

Austin Trevor and Oscar Homolka in Hitchcock's 'Sabotage'; Charles Boyer in 'Stavisky . . .'



who composed the scores for *Jour de Fête* and *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*; Mark Robson, director (*Bedlam, The Prize, Earthquake*); Josette Day, French actress, Cocteau's Beauty in *La Belle et La Bête*.

JULY: Miguel Echarri, for ten years director of the San Sebastian film festival, co-producer of Antonioni's *The Passenger*; Oliver Messel, stage designer who occasionally worked in films (*Romeo and Juliet, The Thief of Baghdad, Queen of Spades*); Carleton Hobbs, veteran British character actor; Jean-Louis Bouquet, scriptwriter, designer and director of French fantasy films from 1923 (*La Cité Foudroyée*) to the late 50s.

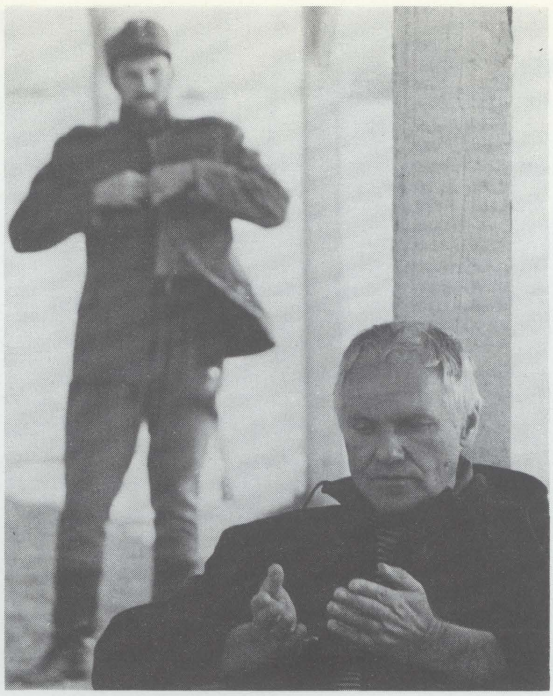
AUGUST: Giuseppe Colizzi, director of comic Spaghetti Westerns; Charles Boyer, actor (*Mayerling, Madame de . . ., Stavisky*); Jomo Kenyatta, who also appeared in *Sanders of the River*; Charles Eames, who designed chairs and made idiosyncratic short films; Sir David Cunynghame, Korda's financial *éminence grise*; Vera Maretskaya, Russian actress (the *Gorky* trilogy) and Donskoi's *Mother*; Olivier Hussenot, veteran French character actor (*Les Grands Manoeuvres, Fanfan la Tulipe*); Robert Shaw, actor (*The Caretaker, A Man for All Seasons, Jaws*) and novelist; Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, leading Argentinian director of claustrophobic melodramas (*The House of the Angel, The Fall, The Eavesdropper*): Jack L. Warner, last of the movie moguls.

SEPTEMBER: O. E. Hasse, German actor (*Canaris*), later in Hollywood (*Decision Before Dawn, I Confess*); Clifford McLaglen, who appeared in early British films and was one of the first Tarzans; Lina Carstens, German actress in Zarah Leander films, later the heroine of *Lina Braake*; Lee Garmes, distinguished Hollywood cameraman (*City Streets, Shanghai Express, Duel in the Sun*).

OCTOBER: Edgar Bergen, the ventriloquist voice of Charlie McCarthy, who played several character roles; Dermot Breen, founder and director of the Cork Film Festival and Irish film censor; Dan Dailey, cheerful song and dance man in Hollywood musicals (*Lady Be Good, Give My Regards to Broadway, It's Always Fair Weather*); Gig Young, American actor, often cast as the man who didn't get the girl (*That Touch of Mink, They Shoot Horses Don't They?*); Geoffrey Unsworth, British cinematographer (*Becket, 2001, Cabaret*); Kenneth Adam, Head of BBC TV in the 60s and former Governor of the BFI; Salka Viertel, Polish-born Hollywood scriptwriter (*Queen Christina, The Painted Veil, Two-Faced Woman*); H. A. L. Craig, Irish critic and scriptwriter (*Anzio, Waterloo*).

NOVEMBER: Denis O'Dea, Irish actor (*Odd Man Out, The Informer*); Claude Dauphin, dapper French actor, best remembered as Simone Signoret's pimp in *Casque d'Or*; Theo Lingen, elegant Austrian actor (*M. Mabuse*); André Morell, television's Quatermass; Rank starlet Susan Shaw.

Miklos Jancsó



David Robinson

OLD JANCSO CUSTOMS

Vitam et Sanguinem is Miklós Jancsó's first film in Hungary since *Elektreia*. It is also the most costly production in the country's film history. The budget of sixty million forints, however, is not so huge as it first appears, since the work will be a trilogy of three full-length features.

First reports that Jancsó was to make a film about Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinsky were intriguing. Even with a main street of Budapest named in his honour, Bajcsy-Zsilinsky remains a controversial figure for Hungarians. He was born in 1886 into the 'gentry' class, and his early public career was identified with the far right. Later, however, a passionate nationalism brought him into alliance with populist and progressive movements in opposition to Nazism. A fearlessly outspoken member of parliament, he was executed in 1944 for a plot against Hitler. With an accommodation with the left that might more readily be seen as convenience than positive conversion, he is no conventional socialist hero.

Jancsó and his regular writer-collaborator Gyula Hernádi took the unusual step of publishing a scenario, which they called a 'film novel', before starting to shoot. The publication looked rather like an attempt to test the temperature, to draw out in advance any controversy over a treatment in which the main lines of Bajcsy-Zsilinsky's career remain clearly discernible, however large the poetic licence of detail. The fictitious name given to the hero, Endre Felsöbajcsai Zsadanyi, still retains an unmistakable resemblance to the name of the historical figure. No one in Hungary was likely to be in doubt about his identity.

The scenario as published is complex and difficult; and I am grateful to Mári Kuttna for guiding me through it. The first film, *Hungarian Rhapsody*, begins with Endre as a young officer. He is responsible for the death of a peasant political leader; and organises the rounding-up of peasants for army service. After the 1914 War he becomes an M.P. and supports Horthy (identified as The Governor), but is exiled to his estates. At an orgiastic celebration of the overthrow of the 1919 Republic, a young Countess with whom he is involved kills herself. Her ghost haunts Endre's dreams. He confides to a journalist friend that he thinks he is going mad. The journalist tells him madness is only being out of step with society: perhaps Endre is a born radical and should be with the left.

In *Allegro Barbaro*, Endre is involved in a relationship with a young communist girl. He fights a duel with the Prime Minister. The girl is imprisoned and sentenced to death. Her last request is to make love before she dies; she persuades the young prisoner deputed to the job to strangle her. Meanwhile Endre is shot and injured while trying to enter a train where the Governor and Hitler are meeting, in order to plead for her life.

In *Concerto*, we find Endre with a Yugoslav girl, a friend of the executed Communist. They join a Serbian partisan leader who has captured the Hungarian official responsible for a massacre of the Serbs (it is now 1942). They protest at a public humiliation of Jews, by joining the victims. Endre is persuaded to take part in a plot against Hitler's life, and is approached by the Prime Minister to arrange a rapprochement with the left. He is killed in the great *putsch* following the deposition of Horthy in October 1944.

This 'film novel' (the action is much more complex than this brief summary can indicate) must be taken as a declaration of intention; and the intention looks much like a Hungarian *1900*, an individual conscience seen against a panorama of three eruptive decades of history. But a script for Jancsó is clearly only a starting point, as much for rejection as inspiration. 'There was a lot of controversy,' beamed Jancsó. 'The shooting script is very different.' (Endre, incidentally, is now called István.) The shooting script, in turn, was evidently being drastically revised daily during filming.

In high summer Jancsó was filming at Kövagoörs, near Lake Balaton. The unit had found its own small private lake and built the principal set beside it: a large, beautiful white villa which looked as if it had been there a century, with a flock of pigeons already in firm possession of the loft. The cast were identifiable as the ones sweating in the shade in flannel uniforms. The crew wore only bathing costumes.

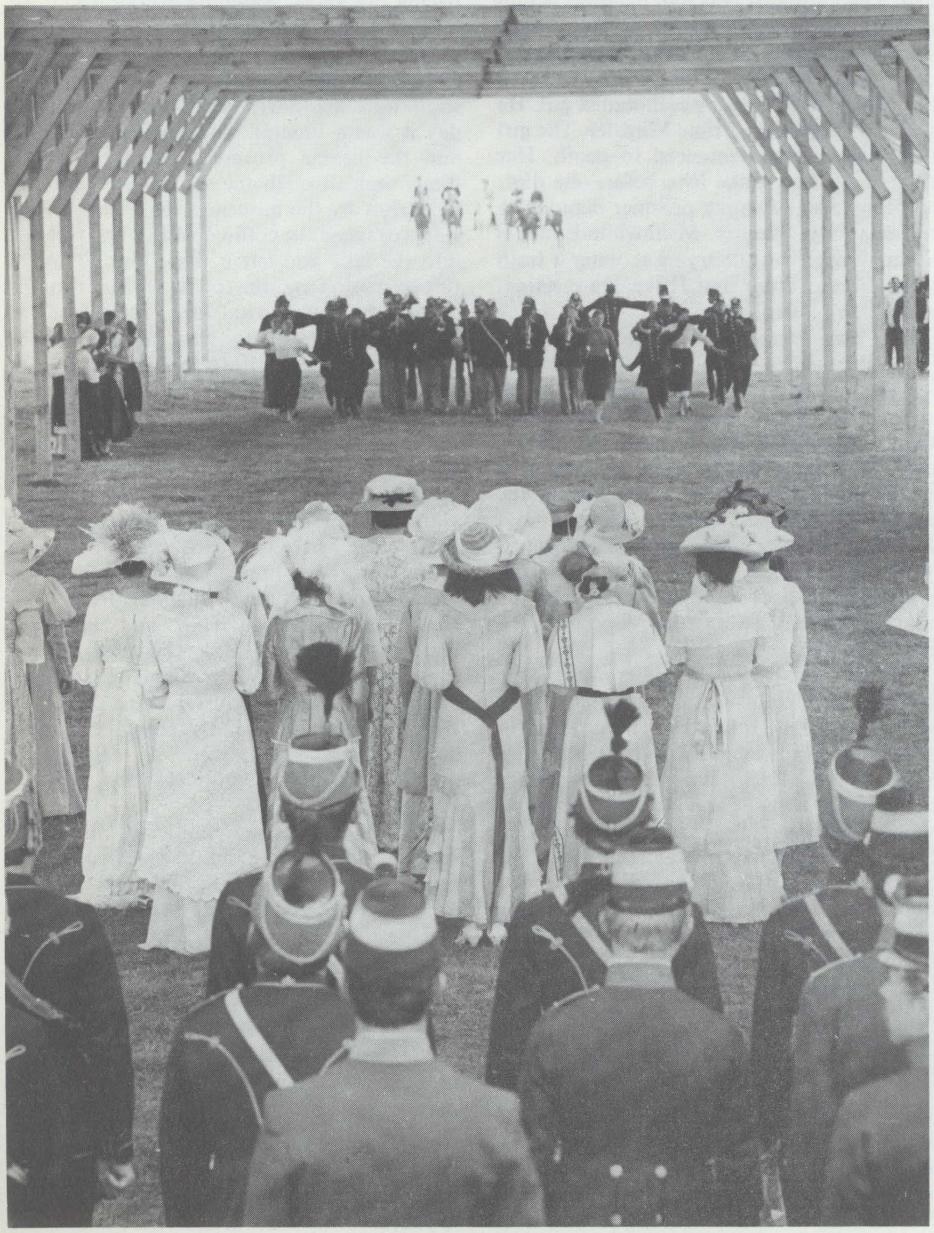
Work started at 11. On ordinary days they had to wait to film until the sun was low; and this week they were shooting scenes that depended on catching the red sunset. Jancsó seemed to be favouring the characteristic manner of elaborate *mise-en-shot* more or less abandoned in *Private Vices, Public Virtues*. The elements assembled themselves almost imperceptibly in the course of the day. The horses were walked to and fro; the dog handlers kept a pack of fearsome hounds in patience; the soldiers ('We need a thousand, so we depend on the army') were fitted out from the mobile wardrobe, then sent on a long march to take up positions the other side of the lake; a military band puffed into tune. Painters put the finishing touches to two coffins and a baroque hearse. A famous five-horse carriage excited attention, and everyone had to have a ride in it. And then we all went off to marvel at a new arrival: a beautiful white horse which had been bought for 20,000 forints, shot, and stuffed at a cost of another 30,000; and which now stood wrapped in plastic, waiting for its role in István's dream.

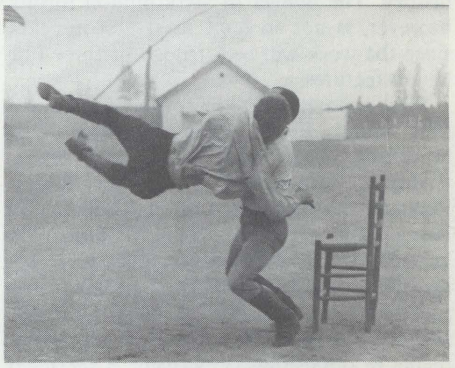
Jancsó conferred—with the actors, with Hernádi, with Kende the cameraman—lying on a sofa in the villa or striding around, pacing out shots, watching everything. It all looked total, incorrigible confusion, until suddenly it was 5.45; the light was right; and everything miraculously was in place. The shots were made with surprising speed. This day it was a funeral. The soldiers, the band and the hearse processed round the lake, dimly seen through the smoke from torches held aloft by the mourners. In the next shot riders dragged the coffin on a burning raft out into the lake and left it there blazing. Were this cremation and the torches old Hungarian customs? 'No—just old Jancsó customs.'

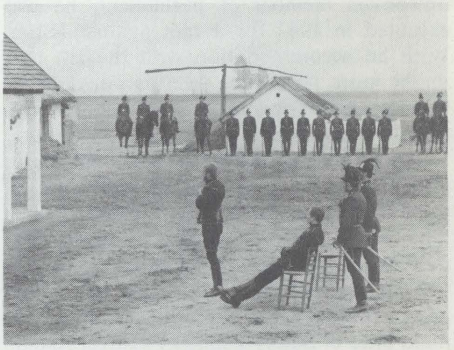
Another day there was an even more distinctive Jancsó shot. Kende arranged a long track, around which a very elaborate *mise-en-scène* was created in the course of the afternoon. The camera had to follow István as he came out of the house, passed a rifle salute and through a party of soldiers dancing with flaming swords, to meet the Minister's party as it arrived in carriages. Still in the same shot, the visitors and István talked at a table in the open air, behind which soldiers passed to and fro. They got up, were photographed, and took their leave. The camera moved from watching the carriages disappear into distant dust, to track along the side of the villa, shooting through the open doors to the lake beyond. In the further doorway stood a party of peasants with red favours.

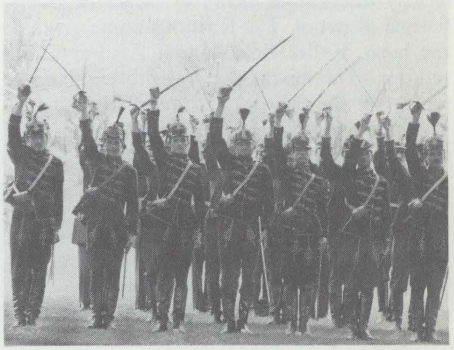
All was set up and faultlessly rehearsed. The sun was perfect; and then it abruptly hid behind a cloud and stayed there. No film was exposed that day. The day before everything had been washed out by the most dramatic storm to hit Balaton in memory. Jancsó only beamed enigmatically as usual. Everyone else was anxious, as they vainly searched the 'film novel', which had just appeared, in hope of divining something of his deeper intentions, and for some clue as to what they were all doing there. It was clear that none of them would have wagered that June day that by October the first two parts of the trilogy would have been shot and in the cutting room. ■

JANCSO'S VITAM ET SANGUINEM









'China 9, Liberty 37'

1978 EDINBURGH FILM FESTIVAL

There's no such thing as a soft-hearted gunfighter

Richard Combs

There was a good deal of discussion at the 1978 Edinburgh Film Festival about what kind of thing the cinema is, and specifically what kind of thing the British cinema might be. The debate took in the contents of a report from the Association of Independent Producers, arguing for the British Film Authority to replace the present inadequate arrangements for government support of the industry, and two papers which approached the mythical beast from more theoretical (if scarcely complementary) positions. Under the heading of 'The Myopic British and Their Invisible Cinema', Tom Clarke discussed in various historical, social and aesthetic contexts the fallacies of the British attitude towards cinema. Treating British popular cinema not so much as a problem as an ideal, John McGrath discussed the fallacy of assuming that it could exist at all in present commercial/consumerist contexts. Both advanced towards diametrically opposed models of what might be done (emulate the formulae of successful popular film-makers like Roger Corman; rediscover the 'real' world of the British people themselves) by arguments that were perfectly consistent and self-contained. Even at those points where they stuck to the same problems, they revolved in opposite directions. In answer to the question of how an indigenous cinema might be created when there doesn't seem to be an indigenous audience to support it, Tom Clarke proposed that the American cinema's ability to mythologise its people's experience was what made it great, and that if the British followed suit they might also capture an international audience. John McGrath proposed that a cinema genuinely rooted in the social realities of its people would inevitably be of interest to others.

Usually, the best place to escape from such conundrums is in the cinema. But the surprise of Edinburgh 1978 turned out to be that a reflective, self-interrogative approach to movies was generally true of the movies themselves. Not surprising, of course, that such concerns should crop up in a variety of experimental forms (*Junior Godard, Argument*); or even that, given the self-consciousness typical of the younger generation of Hollywood directors, such mainstream films as *The Fury* and *The Driver* ride on an awareness of other movies which the maker clearly feels he shares with his audience. But even the simple pleasures of a range of B-features and genre films, whose strongest quality used to be their undeviating functionalism, and the subversive charge this often gave them in dealing with ambiguous situations, have been complicated by a need to tinker and reconsider. The result ranges from such playful variations as *Outside Chance,* which is a remake-with-a-difference, another version (and for about the first twenty minutes, exactly the same version) of New World's Deep South exploitation film, *Jackson County Jail,* to the altogether more scrambled *China 9, Liberty 37,* a Western which relates less clearly to Monte Hellman's

previous 'absurdist' exercises than it does to the increasingly distanced mythology of Sam Peckinpah. In the process it becomes a reflection on a reflection, while incorporating unadulterated elements of romantic kitsch and Spaghetti Western melodrama.

The net result of such a conjunction of discussion and programming was that Edinburgh very much gave the appearance of a forum where theory was constantly trying to turn into practice, and practice was trying to open up to considerations of theory. It is appropriate, also, that such a *rapprochement* should take place at Edinburgh, where similar conjunctions have caused great controversy in the past. The Festival's twin commitment to theoretical study outside the usual range of journalistic criticism, and to a kind of cinema usually held beneath the contempt of that same criticism, has raised the spectre of some unbridgeable absurdities. With the 1974 Raoul Walsh season and its accompanying booklet, an unholy marriage seemed to have been concluded, one which was even arraigned before the court of a popular television show on the cinema.

The theoretical range of this particular debate—given that it was looking for some very concrete models that were often assumed to exist but to be beyond the ability of the non-cinematic British to apprehend—should not be exaggerated; nor should the kind of questions thrown up by a rather thinly varied selection of feature films. A different set of questions about film might have been raised by the separate event of new British avant-garde, which is outside the scope of this article. But it is a curious combination—a loss of commercial confidence and the artistic inability to pretend any more to be naive about the repetition of story types—that seems responsible for *China 9, Liberty 37,* and of commercial calculation and formal daring that produces *Outside Chance*. Cumulatively, the programme revealed that, however traditional the narrative forms employed, the cinema screen was becoming increasingly transparent to the processes that went into their making. Also, just as the old debate that raged round the primacy of form or content failed to acknowledge the capacity of one to turn into the other, so the barriers erected between theoretical and pragmatic/practical approaches to film begin to look less solid. Like the features at Edinburgh which pretended to be seamless fictions, but couldn't help pondering on their own illusionism, the critical split begins to look more like an uneasy circling, with an implicit theory about the practice of film sliding in and out of explicit theories about its nature.

The title of this article is a paraphrase of a line of dialogue from *China 9, Liberty 37*: the reproach of Warren Oates' grizzled rancher to the handsome young gunfighter who has stolen his wife and then refused to kill him after gaining the upper hand in the last reel showdown. It fairly summarises an ironic distance from the clichés of the genre and a bemused mingling with them, and might also be taken as a fitting epithet for a festival in which new forms were vaguely being sought in the ruins of the old—although the exercise frequently had the air of a nostalgic re-examination rather than a rigorous excavation. Its reproach, then, might be widely reapplied: there's no such thing as a soft-hearted absurdist Western (*China 9* itself) or a soft-hearted materialist essay (*Junior Godard*), or a soft-hearted experiment in neo-narrative (*Chameleon*).

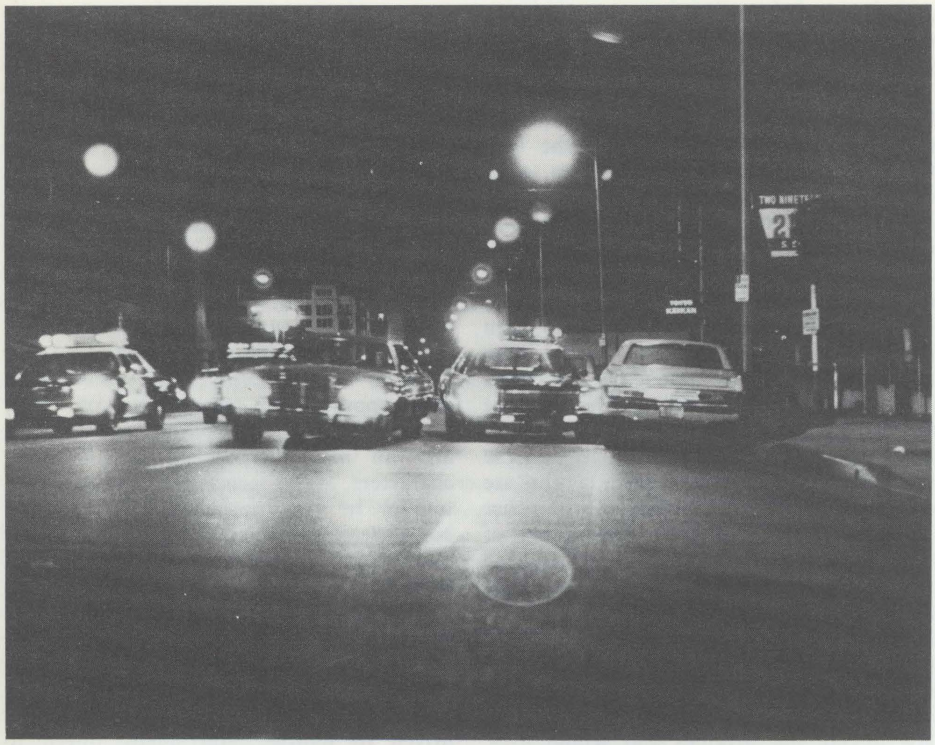
The title of *China 9, Liberty 37* is taken from the signpost that appears in the opening shot, as a lone individual takes the fork towards China and the film plumps, as it were, to follow that particular narrative track rather than the other. But if the sign it travels under announces it to be a narrative accident—and also geographically arbitrary and metaphorically meaningless—*China 9* very quickly establishes its co-ordinates when the stranger rides into China, and a long tracking shot picks out among the bystanders some children playing marbles. The reference to *The Wild Bunch* is confirmed when it is later revealed that the stranger is the representative of railroad interests who are eager to have ex-gunman-now-rancher Matthew Sebanek (Warren Oates) out of their way, and who to that end arrange the reprieve from hanging of gunfighter Clay Drumm (Fabio Testi). Clay's ironic taunt to his employers about the man he is being sent to kill—'I thought he worked for you . . . ?'—extends the range of reference to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* with its vision of corporate law buying out loyalties and selling lives. Thereafter, the film proceeds by various winks and nods—a shot of Sebanek's wife Catherine (Jenny Agutter) coming to Clay in the barn in her nightdress recalls *Cable Hogue*—to the revelation of its true subject and guiding presence. In a hotel lobby, Sam Peckinpah pops up as a shabby dime novelist, bidding for the rights to the story of Clay's exploits ('I bring the West to the East. Some people say I tell lies . . .'), after being seen, in an introductory bit of business, slipping a cigar away from a blind man.

But, in his own straitened circumstances (forced to accommodate his potboiling, Italian Western sources in the form of a blankly intractable hero and an increasingly tedious revenge plot), Hellman is really after neither *hommage* nor a testament to his own existentialist view of the West. Rather, his point is the contentiousness (and hard times) of the Western in current cinema. This notion is represented at the thematic level by the inclusion of Peckinpah, as the *enfant terrible* who may have helped immolate the form by pushing it to its most self-conscious extreme, and at other metaphoric levels by the discovery of the circus dwarf in the desert (a gratuitous eccentricity representing the contribution of the Italian Western?) and by the sequence in which Clay and Catherine watch the sorry circus spectacle. Clay refuses to be made a sideshow when offered a job by the ringmaster; a fate, it might be remembered, from which Randolph Scott is rescued at the beginning of *Ride the High Country*. Hellman's own personality, sadly, is only fitfully evident, but when it is, appropriately, it creates further problems about how we should respond to the conventions. Both giggles and grimaces are provoked by the long sequence in which, having been left for dead by the fleeing lovers, Warren Oates predictably begins to come to life on the floor of his cabin, and tries first with one hand and then the other to reach the knife recently planted in his back by his wife.

Outside Chance also turns out to be surprisingly various (and rather more controlled) in mood. It is tempting almost to suppose that this alternate version of *Jackson County Jail*—also directed by Michael Miller, who judiciously developed the schematic characters and situations of the original—was undertaken as much as a way of rethinking some of its possibilities as of cashing in again on its combustible plot. The second time around, Miller has managed to incorporate certain overtones which in the original seemed accidental, such as the cliff-hanging serial aspect of the misfortunes which endlessly befall his heroine. In the latter stages, as Dinah Hunter (Yvette Mimieux) finally finds her saviour, a renowned concert pianist and back to nature enthusiast, *The Perils of Pauline* seems to be casually and quite appropriately transformed into some Sirkian romance. In exploring such moods, and an altogether richer set of minor characters, Miller seems to relish the opportunities he has been afforded simply by being released from the plot of *Jackson County Jail,* and its deterministic social/political implications.

This he achieves by whisking through the exposition, the fatalistic circumstances by which chic advertising executive Dinah is stripped of her possessions and identity in a drive across America, brutally raped and driven to murder, and finally forced to acknowledge that she is now an outsider to the society she once perfectly incarnated. Miller's elliptical tactic may be commercially expedient—he needn't do more than remind audiences of the situation which they've seen before—but its effect is to detach such thematic elements as Dinah's friendship with a variety of fellow female outcasts, and her gradual absorption into the peripheral life style of petty criminals and drifters, from the original, over-driven plot mechanism. Miller's inauguration of the 'rethink', rather than the remake, is the most appealing recent development from the Corman factory, which has been coasting for too long on its easy critical reputation for combining old forms and new experiences—as witness the cosy conventionality of Jonathan Demme's *Citizens Band*.

A more deliberate and less appealing revaluation of a popular genre, Walter Hill's *The Driver* draws on European attitudes to the American thriller, and relocates them with a pained artiness in the native context. Hill scrupulously copies the manners and method of Jean-Pierre Melville: his characters are nameless phantoms, without histories and without identities apart from the roles they play in a balletic game of cat and mouse. But Hill gets the balance wrong in his opposition of the wholly suppressed, monolithically integral half of this world—Ryan O'Neal as the ultimate professional The Driver, whose price for a job comes high but whose life otherwise is a succession of barren hotel rooms, with country and western music from a tape recorder constantly crooning into the emptiness—and its antithesis, the extrovert scheming cop played by Bruce Dern. The latter's need to talk out the rules of this nocturnally unreal game, and to exult in his own cunning at playing it, is squared off for comic effect against the former's capacity simply to embody it with steely concentration. But an air of unconscious parody eventually infects O'Neal's incarnation of the existential 'wheelman', mainly because the film is trying both to have its cake and eat it, setting up the contest as an impenetrable



'The Driver'

ritual, the beauty of whose moves can be admired but the motives of whose players cannot be understood, while providing through Dern an obvious source of entry into the game and functional information about the participants.

Commentary and discussion, again, were usefully served by two films which fairly illustrated the difference between the current state of play of popular cinema in Britain and America. While the Americans do (as graphically illustrated by Christian Blackwood's *Roger Corman—Hollywood's Wild Angel*), the British go on talking (rather despairingly in Maurice Hatton's *Long Shot*, in which the characters attempt to raise support for an independent feature about the oil boom in Aberdeen, to be called *Gulf and Western*). In fact, the putative film-within-the-film of *Long Shot*, given the evident intention of its producer figure, played by Charles Gormley, and writer (Neville Smith), that it should have the resonance of a Western, fits the prescription of Tom Clarke's paper calling for a British cinema that would mythologise the strongest qualities of local life and culture. Clarke identifies these as a taste for melodrama and eccentricity, in place of such a cinematically non-viable institution as 'the underplayed, "realistic" form of dramatic expression.' The yen for the mythological also crops up in the would-be film-makers' efforts to track down Samuel Fuller, rumoured to be appearing for the 1977 Edinburgh Film Festival (where a large part of this film was shot), as their choice of director for *Gulf and Western*. During this search, they record a conversation with Wim Wenders, who had used Fuller in *The American Friend* and who comments briefly on his ambivalent feelings about the American myths that have been imprinted on his own country and consciousness.

'Long Shot': Neville Smith, Ann Zelda and Charles Gormley

But in other respects, the style of *Long Shot* itself scarcely suggests *how* British films might be made differently. It harks back to the larkiness of the 60s, when cinematic tropes were used to peculiarly literary effect: its stylistic model might be *Tom Jones*, whose straight-to-camera dialogue is replaced here by the occasional disruption of flashes of black leader in between sequences, and whose derivation from the prototype English novel is aped in the lengthy, joke chapter headings which precede individual episodes. Most significantly, perhaps, the hunt-for-Fuller becomes an oblique illustration of Tom Clarke's remarks on the English preoccupation with matter over manner. At least when it is compared (at the risk of making the Festival seem a very incestuous jamboree) with the hunt for Godard in *Junior Godard* or for Peckinpah in *China 9, Liberty 37*, where the presence of the invited *auteur* serves also to illuminate the thematic and structural concerns of the films.

In this sense, *Long Shot* tells us as little about the kind of cinema we might want as John McGrath's high-minded but rather dismaying pontifications. In effect, the latter's generalised remarks could be taken as advocating something as insular (despite his disclaimer about chauvinism, McGrath invoked the bogey of 'some mid-Western, non-English-speaking sex criminal' as the audience at which any film that can't recoup its costs in this country has to be aimed), pragmatic and bound by narrow notions of social responsibility as the Free Cinema movement. Christian Blackwood's essay on Corman is scarcely pioneering new forms, but it does come up with a rather novel and amusing one in treating its subject's philosophy of film—basically, action, humour, sex and a little social comment, in that order—and his studio's output as one long trailer for a Corman movie. In the process, it portrays the young, aspiring film-makers who work in the factory for minimum rewards but maximum opportunities as having much the spirit of Santa's helpers.

One might have looked to Christian Weisenborn's *I Am My Films: A Portrait of Werner Herzog* for a revelation not just of a different *auteur* but of a different film-making model. In the event, the film sticks somewhere in between the conventional biography indicated by the title and an attempt to identify the kind of cinema espoused by its subject. Or at least it attempts to make clear that the normal format of the talking-head documentary may not be the best way of revealing either personality or a method of work. The interviewer (and often the rest of the film team) is frequently visible, and his technique—at one moment asking Herzog what they should talk about, at another dismissing his recollection of a childhood trauma with the observation that it is probably fairly common and that what is important is what comes out of it—seems designed to underline the partial, ambiguous, qualified nature of the material. But this is allied to an unimaginatively 'illustrative' use of clips from Herzog's films, and to a failure to make more than anecdotal use of his comments: his distrust of psychology ('A room illuminated to the furthest corner is no longer habitable'), the close identification of his films with his life, and his feelings about

death ('What relationship do you have with your own death? When you've cleared that up, nothing really matters').

As if to chime in with the English dilemma, *Junior Godard* (*Der kleine Godard*) asks the question, 'Is it possible to make films in Germany today?' Or, as Godard Senior proposes in an alternative challenge, 'Is a German capable of making an image?' The context of the problem is twofold. The film's director, Hellmuth Costard, records—both through extensive notebook entries and detailed display of the equipment itself—his attempts to devise a synchronised, Super-8 multi-camera system which would enable him to 'make feature films without imagination: to use undoctored events as the perfect *mise en scène* . . . to suggest direction through montage and cross-cutting.' Interspersed with these speculations (after the fact: the system failed through technical inadequacies and the refusal of a grant from the Young German Cinema Production Board), Costard traces the efforts of himself and some colleagues to use a cultural award to bring Jean-Luc Godard to Hamburg to work on an unspecified programme of films.

This last scheme also seems to have been doomed to run aground on various organisational obstacles, although Godard duly appears in Hamburg for an interview with a baffled city official, and leaves after imparting some typically gnomic reflections (toying with a large A-shaped compass, he comments on how the letters of the alphabet were derived from mathematics), if nothing to the city's cinematic culture. The film is a witty if somewhat woolly tangle, in which aesthetic strategies seem to be nosing, rather like blind mice in a maze, round material difficulties. It also provides, if not in answer to the Godardian challenge at least as an alternate aesthetic reality, glimpses of German directors going about their business: Hark Bohm directing some children in a simulated shoot-out, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder at work on *Despair*.

If there was anything like a Fassbinder film in the Festival, it was probably Mark Rappaport's *The Scenic Route,* in which the plot and characters of an archetypal melodrama of everyday life are treated with a degree of stylised irony that Fassbinder at his most theatrical (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant,* say) would be hard put to match. In these days of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,* a soap opera parody is hardly likely to raise a flicker of interest in the cinema, but Rappaport employs a range of perceptual tricks and visual conundrums that set the film somewhere in between the genuinely experimental and a game-playing literary tease. The games that people play, and a wicked sense of the pretentious, self-important *pensées* of his middle-class, East Coast American characters, provide the subject of *The Scenic Route.* But the bright, antiseptic colours and the flat, restricted planes in which people move (aurally as well as visually, since the bulk of the dialogue is voice-over commentary) are as succinctly expressive.

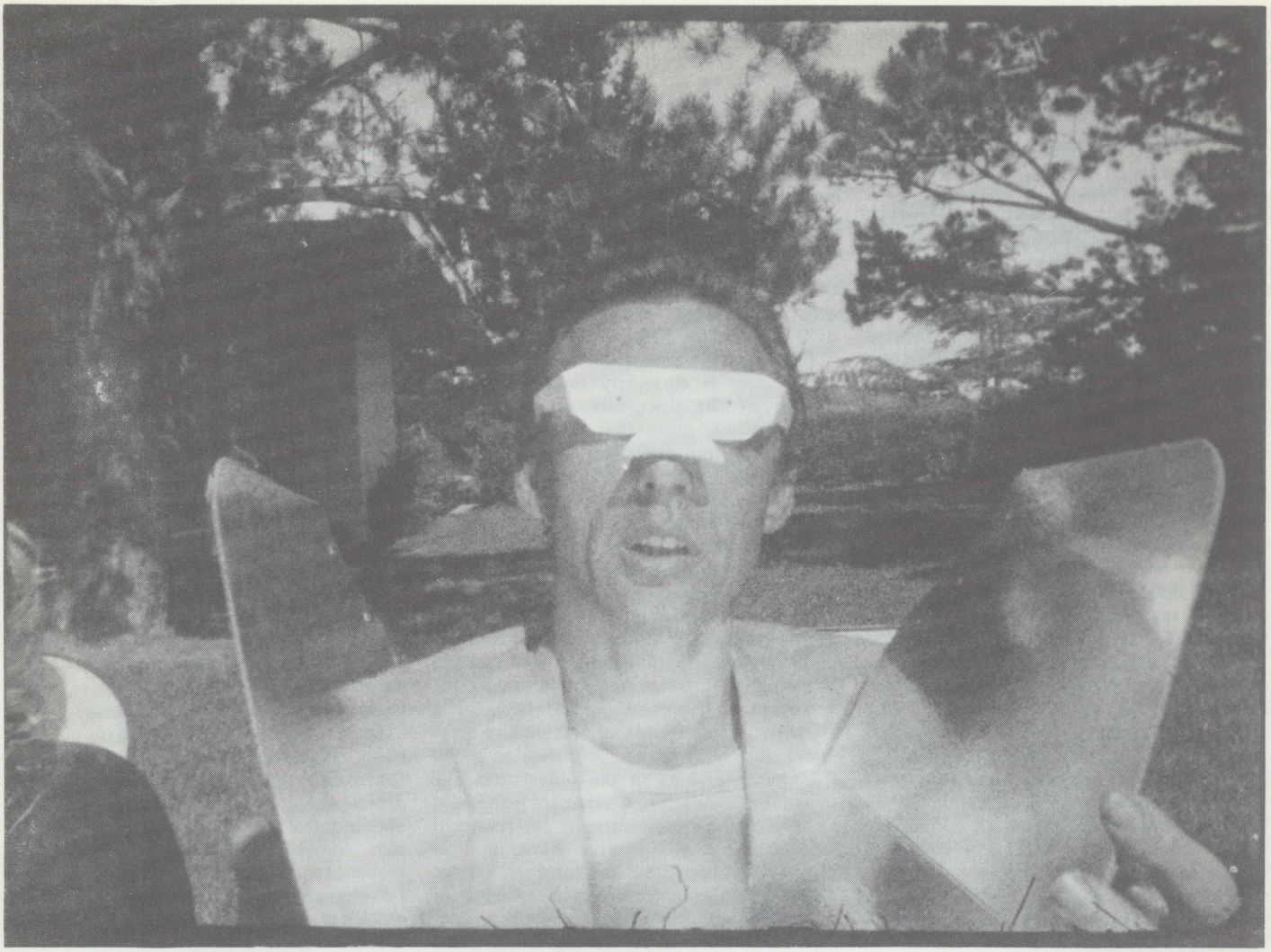
Peter Handke's *The Left-handed Woman* also seems to be suppressing, or rather concentrating, a wealth of narrative material beneath images which manage to be unambiguously sharp and crystalline yet still mysterious. Although both *The Scenic Route* and Handke's film reveal a supreme disregard for the psychological—which may, anyway, no longer be such an avant-garde position, considering its sly rechannelling in *The Driver*—they end up travelling in opposite directions. Where Rappaport pushes his soap opera material beyond its naturalistic conventions into some realm where the hyper-real collides with sarcastic satire, Handke is definitely probing at a 'real' situation—the state of mind of a middle-class German woman, living in France, immediately after she has decided she no longer wants to live with her husband—though using the most stylised means to do it.

The apparent misalignment of ends and means here is extremely revealing in the context of the discussion on the British cinema which, given that it draws on the assumptions and prejudices of 'a pragmatic, materialistic people', clearly finds it difficult to accept such a contradiction as a viable basis for art. Hence the rather limited proposals that were put forward for a popular cinema, in terms of the out and out fantasy of Corman quickies or a bracingly didactic, socially committed approach. Hence also, perhaps, the absence in Britain of a tradition of experimentation and formal tinkering in between the popular cinema, however tentative its status, and the varieties of abstract/structuralist/minimalist film-making which receive their impetus as much from developments in the other arts. The situation, to judge from seminars being held as part of the concurrent International Television Festival, is even worse in that medium. A discussion, for instance, on the pitfalls of the cinéma vérité concept of documentary never moved beyond a consideration of how its pitfalls might be avoided (and thus, by implication, its verisimilitude increased) to possible alternative ways of presenting and analysing 'real' situations on film. The equation of truthfulness of appearance with truthfulness of content still proves the greatest psychological stumbling block.

Jon Jost's *Chameleon* was probably the happiest instance of a mixed marriage at the Festival: combining a freaky, trippy (in fact almost Corman-esque) saga of a dope-dealer and all-round hustler with an abstract distillation of patterns of colour and light. The 'place' of the latter in the film is both somewhere within the drug-laced nimbus of its title character, Terry (Bob Glaudini), and somewhere outside its ironic description of the rampant merchandising of all other human activities. In a way, this abstract element almost serves as a secondary narrative, or at least becomes the 'point' of the film. At the beginning, Terry is seen hustling a painter of just such abstract designs to come up with six imitations of another painter which he can unload on the art market. With some 'persuasion', Terry overcomes the painter's reluctance, and at the end of the film returns to collect his merchandise. But the rolls of paper he is given turn out to be blank, and the painter defiantly protests 'My life is colour, form, the shape of things . . .' before Terry knocks him down and leaves him lying in a pool of spilled colours that return us to the 'abstracts' which were shown in detail in the opening shots. It is probably not too deterministic a reading to see Jost as the painter and the blank sheets as the conventional movie which he has refused to provide for audience consumption.

But in between, his narrative not only holds together but unfolds through a fascinating succession of moods as Terry drives about Los Angeles, moving from appointment to appointment, from role to role. At one point, at the end of a long sequence in which he seems to be renewing a personal acquaintance on a hilltop some way outside the city, he and his companion go into a brief song and dance ('I want to be phoney, I want to be fake, not real'). The unreality of Los Angeles clearly serves as a prime cause, and a natural cradle, for the dreaming of cocaine dreams, and through it Jost even makes contact with a literary source. After telling one of his clients about the barber who once warned him about his unnatural hair loss, and advised him to have a cancer test,

'Junior Godard': Hellmuth Costard with his Super-8 equipment



Bob Glaudini in Jon Jost's 'Chameleon'

Terry refers to science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick and comments, 'This feller seemed like a casualty straight from his pages.'

Dick's presence, however, might already have been noted in the film (and the influence, perhaps, of his most paranoid fantasy of the futuristic drug ghetto of present-day Los Angeles, *A Scanner Darkly*), particularly in the section where a silent Terry listens in his car to a tape-recorded stream of musings and reminders about meetings and missions, contacts to be made and problems to be solved. Towards the end, when Terry's shadowy, role-playing identity has begun to dissolve even further ('If I could hypnotise myself, I could be anything I wanted'), he stands howling out of a window while daubing himself with blue paint. Both character and film at this point, it seems implied, have completed the flip from normal modes of being or representation into the floating patterns which Jost's painter immediately afterwards proclaims as his life's work. ■

1978 EDINBURGH TELEVISION FESTIVAL

Professional shall speak to professional

Jerry Kuehl

The Edinburgh International Television Festival was never intended to be like Montreux, Cannes, Karlovy Vary, or even BAFTA. Edinburgh awards no prizes, clinches no deals, and, indeed, does not even publish lists of delegates. Its purpose, in the first two years of its existence, has been to provide a meeting ground for professional film-makers; a kind of neutral territory where, having checked their guns at the door, all those concerned with the making of programmes could exchange views, talk over common problems, or raise contentious issues without being obliged to adopt public postures. To paraphrase the old BBC slogan, Edinburgh is the place where professional shall speak to professional without having to send covering memos to the Public Relations Department and the Company Solicitor.

In other words, the organisers of the Festival began with the conviction that while there might be no lack of opportunities for high level, or formal, exchanges—through the Royal Television Society, the BKTS, the University of Manchester Symposia or even the Annan Committee—there was a need for an annual forum devoted to the concerns of television practitioners with the agenda set by themselves, and not diluted by questions of corporate prestige or the imperatives of sales departments. And that, in 1977, is what they set out to provide. No one ever suggested that the proceedings should be *secret,* but the committee which helped to organise that first Festival gave much thought to how to protect the confidentiality of what was said, in the sense that they appreciated the participants would have to have confidence that their remarks would be neither misrepresented to those who were not present, nor trivialised or treated as mere debating points by those who were there.

If the Festival could not provide a forum where participants could speak with candour, they felt, there was little point in holding it at all. So important was this point that the advisory committee quite seriously questioned whether 'Festival', rather than 'Workshop' was the right name for the gathering, and whether it ought not to have 'participants' rather than 'delegates'. This, too, was why efforts were made to discourage casual visitors—to the extent that even some professionals believed that they would not be

welcome unless they had been formally invited. Though that belief was false, the impulse which lay behind it was sound: the purpose of the gathering was to allow participants to speak freely, and anything or anyone which inhibited candour was not welcome. Only on that basis did the enterprise make sense.

And what has this to do with Edinburgh 1978? Quite a lot. There is a standard clause in contracts offered to producers, directors and others who work for the BBC or for companies which are members of the Independent Television Contractors Association, which prohibits them from writing or speaking in public about matters pertaining to their company without the permission of their employers. (Certain executives of ITCA companies are formally enjoined from public comment about the affairs of their company in any circumstances.) In practice, of course, the force of this clause may be eroded by executives who make clear to their subordinates that they will automatically give such permission. Sometimes, those who are formally bound by such contracts decide simply to ignore them. But the clause, however offensive it may be, is in the contracts and none who earn their living from programme making can be unaware of its existence—except, it seems, those responsible for the recording by the BBC and London Weekend, for transmission, of the first three days of the 1978 Festival, without the consent of the participants.

The irony of a situation in which representatives of a medium thought by so many to thrive on intrusions into the private affairs of others found themselves relentlessly intruded upon was not lost on the delegates, but not all of them may have grasped its broader implications. First, there is an ethical point: filming without the consent of the subject is discourteous. Courtesy may not be a fundamental moral principle, but it is not a trivial one either. Perhaps this might be the subject of a discussion at the 1979 Festival. Next, a juridical point. Transmitting, that is to say *publishing*, the private utterances of those who are contractually prohibited from speaking for publication without their employer's consent, betrays either ignorance of, or indifference to, questions of law on the part of those who do it. Some, though demonstrably not all, of the delegates may have been prepared to breach their contracts by speaking for transmission, but they were never given a choice. The decision was taken for them by persons who never identified themselves. Perhaps that, too, might be discussed at the next Festival.

But neither the legal nor the ethical point exhausts the matter. Psychologically, the presence of BBC and LWT cameras altered the atmosphere of the Festival. Questions of contractual obligation (or defiance) apart, how many delegates could be expected to talk, or even think, the same way in front of television cameras in a large television studio as they would in a small group? How many took advantage of the presence of the cameras to speak out on matters about which they would remain silent if no cameras were there? How many remained silent because of the cameras? And if any at all did, what has happened to the idea of the Festival as a place where concerned professionals could exchange views without looking over their shoulders?

Though tempting, it would be wrong to account for the change in atmosphere at the 1978 Festival entirely in terms of the TV production teams' intrusion. The size of the Festival, and the nature of its organisation, had their effect as well. About 180 delegates attended in 1977; twice that number came in 1978. The 1977 Festival was organised into plenary sessions and specialist groups, and dealt with a single theme, Drama. This time there was no single theme, and every session was a plenary session. The consequence was that although more people attended, and talked about more subjects, they did so with more formality. In place of the dialogues, exchanges and conversations of 1977, 1978 was the year in which delegates made speeches which were dutifully applauded—just as at any other professional conference. But just another professional conference was what Edinburgh was never supposed to be.

Plenary sessions are invariably dominated by participants who enjoy speaking to large gatherings and have the skills to hold their attention. The very special talents needed to influence audiences of several hundred persons are not necessarily those which make much impact on groups of twenty or thirty, and vice versa. But at this Festival, those who might be articulate in small groups but less at ease in large arenas had no options: they either had to speak to two hundred people at a time, or to hold their peace. Though by waiting until the fourth day they could at least avoid having to broadcast as well.

It may well have been this domination of the Festival by masters of the rhetoric of public meetings which accounts for one of the Festival's most striking failures: its inability to respond critically to the 1978 MacTaggart lecture.

It was given by Norman Lear, the iconoclastic American producer of *Mary Hartman, All in the Family, Fernwood 2-Night,* and other commercially successful programmes, not all of which have been, or are even likely to be, seen in this country. Lear was invited because it was thought that his experience in successfully challenging American programming conventions might contain lessons for British programme makers. Lear agreed with this judgment. As he jovially put it: 'Until *Mary Hartman* there was no discussion of child abuse, wife abuse, mass murder, transexuality, lesbianism, multiple orgasm, death by chicken soup, and dozens of the emotional and physical agonies that occur in the delicate threads of family relationships.' Exploiting such topics comically for their own sake was not, of course, what Norman Lear had in mind. His interest lay in using television comedy to deal with hitherto taboo social problems, of which he also provided examples: 'Homosexuality, abortion, criticisms of the economy and foreign policy, racial prejudice, alcoholism, hypertension, lung cancer, manic depression, and so on.'

But, he said, a 'very vocal minority' wanted '. . . a return to the old taboos. Under the guise of fighting sex and violence on TV, the war is on against substantive content. These warmongers know that you can't deal with society's ills in entertainment without alerting, informing, offending and provoking your audience.'

Now this, clearly, is something that Norman Lear has made a successful career of doing and something which he urged others to do as well. At least, this seemed to be what the delegates understood him to be saying. No wonder his lecture was received with enthusiastic applause and no wonder he became such a popular figure at the Festival in the days after his lecture. But the lecture, as delivered, was not a classic defence of the right of artists to deal honestly with social problems in comic form, even if so doing offends and distresses some members of their audience. Indeed, that is precisely what it was not, because included in it is this throwaway remark: 'I'm not about to defend excessive sex or excessive violence. I'm not inclined to approve of excesses of *any* kind. They are boring . . .' This disclaimer does have serious implications.

Norman Lear recognised no general right of artists to break established taboos in order to challenge and entertain: he recognised only their right to do so in moderation—i.e. without 'excesses'. But he did not appreciate that this is the very position adopted by the network censors he so mocks. Both Lear and the most narrow-minded executive believe there is a line which should not be overstepped, both believe themselves to be qualified to decide where that line should be drawn and both seek guidance in forming their views: the network censor from what Lear describes as groups seeking to 'block content which might be too informative and provocative', like the American Medical Association; Lear from 'responsible, forward thinking groups who really attack major problems.' They even think alike on *why* excessive sex or violence is bad: not because it is degrading, offensive or has harmful social effects, but because it is 'boring'—i.e. not popular with audiences.

Can delegates really not have noticed what he was saying? And can they really not have listened to his final words, in which he called for a Strong Leader to revitalise the world's morals and thereby ensure that private profit and public interest could once again walk hand in hand? It hardly seems likely, yet how else is it possible to account for the fact that the only criticisms directed against him dealt with the quality and the popularity of his productions?

None of the defects of the 1978 Festival are irremediable: there is no reason why plenary sessions need to be televised without the consent of delegates, or for that matter at all. There is no reason why topics dealt with in plenary sessions cannot be dealt with in smaller groups as well, so that everyone may have a chance to speak. There is no reason why the MacTaggart lecture cannot become an object of rigorous scrutiny, as well as a festive occasion. And there is certainly no reason why the 'International' in the Festival's title cannot be expanded to encompass countries other than the United States of America. But such things will not happen automatically.

Television certainly needs open forums. It is not so certain that its needs will be best served by Annual Conferences, with all the formality and rigidity inherent in such gatherings. Perhaps such a development is inevitable, but it would be encouraging to believe that not every good idea has to become the victim of its own success. And Edinburgh is a good idea. ■

The girl hitch-hikers in 'Contre Coeur'

Michael Tarantino

ALAIN TANNER: after JONAH

In June 1978 I talked to Alain Tanner in Geneva, where he was in the midst of preparations for his sixth feature film, at this stage tentatively titled *Contre Coeur*. It represents a return to commercial film-making after a two-year absence. *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000* was the end of a particular period for Tanner, who views his own work with an extremely critical eye. As he says, 'Once you know how to make something, you have to make something else.' In the interim between *Jonah* and the planning of *Contre Coeur,* Tanner worked on *Ecouter Voir,* a five-week series for Swiss television. In collaboration with Francis Reusser (*Le Grand Soir*), Anne-Marie Miéville (*Sur et sous la Communication,* with Godard) and Loretta Verna, Tanner removed himself, for the time being, from the constraints of the commercial narrative film.

The Super-8 work that he did for *Ecouter Voir,* which he describes here in some detail, may be seen as a sort of bridge between *Jonah* and *Contre Coeur*. In talking about the latter film, Tanner mentions the importance of the landscape and of everyday events taking precedence over a classically narrated text. In describing the Super-8 work, he relates how the dreary landscape between Geneva and Berne was transformed for him through the 'magic' of film. This enthusiasm for the cinema was much in evidence as he anticipated the start of shooting that week.

Tanner's interest in extending the limits of the classical narrative certainly goes back to his earlier features, which are all to some extent about the means of transferring images from (film)maker to audience. *La Salamandre* is the most obvious example, with the two writers representing a dialectical approach to the question of representation. Like all Tanner's films, it is concerned with how an audience perceives the work. From the sequence shots in *Charles, mort ou vif* to the integration of tracking shots and static takes in *Le Milieu du Monde,* Tanner has constructed his films against the grain in terms of the 'normal' reading of images and junctures. If there is anything that will tie these films to *Contre Coeur* and the work to follow, it is a refusal to accept the language of cinema as a set of givens and an insistence upon redefining the relationship between film-maker and viewer.

ALAIN TANNER: *Contre Coeur* is about two young girls, 18 and 19 years old, and it's based on an event that took place in France about six years ago. It's just vaguely based on this subject; there's nothing left from the actual story, which was a kind of sordid murder. Two girls were hitch-hiking on the road. After a week of moving around, they killed a man. I've kept only the two girls on the road and the corpse at the end. All the rest is completely different. It is a film about Switzerland, not Switzerland *per se,* but more as a kind of symbol of what could happen to the rest of industrial civilisation. We are really further towards succeeding at what everyone else is trying to do with the people . . . to integrate them completely into a system and to interiorise this integration into the blood of the people. Apart from small sections who may carry on a marginal kind of discourse, this has really happened now in Switzerland. It's the remarkable 'achievement' of industrial capitalism. There is order, there is peace, there is money. There is consumption, there is everything. So that is the landscape in which the girls move around.

One of the girls in the film is going home. She has lost her railway ticket and so she hitch-hikes. The other girl is a student whose exams are coming up and who wants to get out of her room for a few days and breathe some fresh air. She hitch-hikes too and they meet . . . at one point they wind up in the same car. From that first meeting, there is a kind of complicity between them, as well as a strong sense of competition between the city girl and the country girl. But they carry on together, eventually stopping somewhere in the country. At that point, the country girl decides not to go home but to keep on with her friend. After a few days, they have no money left at all. But they decide to keep on going, as a kind of game. A game between them, to see who is going to be the toughest, and a game against everything else. This lasts for a period of about three weeks, during which on the one hand they completely disintegrate and, on the other, they find

themselves . . . I don't know whether I'm being clear, but they discover themselves while they are simultaneously going to pieces. They now have to find how to get something to eat every day and somewhere to sleep at night. They are both between adolescence and adulthood. One day they steal a gun from an army officer with whom they have been riding. On their travels they have been harassed by quite a few men, which is a common occurrence for two girls in that situation, so they keep the gun in their bag for their own protection. Then, one day, they rob a grocer and use the gun. Another day, they use it to threaten some boys who try to become aggressive with them. They have now been seen in different places with the gun.

One night, the two girls have their pictures shown on a TV programme . . . The basis for this is a German television programme called *XY*, which is rather a disgusting thing. It's done in collaboration with the Zurich studio, the German-speaking Swiss television, and the Austrian studio in Vienna. It is actually a kind of game, a TV quiz show about real criminals. They show photographs and objects or pieces of clothing which have belonged to them, and so on. The 'subjects' are on the run. They have committed crimes like hold-ups or even murders in Central Europe—in Germany or Switzerland or Austria. Then the programme stages one of their acts—murder, robbery, etc.—in the pure tradition of the American TV thriller. They have an army of switchboard operators and you can call them if you think you have seen the criminals somewhere. As soon as the programme is over, they are flooded with telephone calls. And they have been quite successful, because instead of having a hundred cops chasing someone about Europe, they have millions of cops. Some of those viewers are bound to have spotted the people involved. Of course, many calls are made just to denounce your neighbour because you don't like him. There are lots of stories like that . . .

In any event, in this case the programme announcers say, 'We don't know who these two girls are . . . they are surely not terrorists . . . but they have a big gun and they have been threatening people, robbing a grocer, etc. If you have seen them, call us.'

So the girls are recognised by various people, and they get very nervous and have to hide. Wherever they go, they might run into someone who has seen the programme. Eventually, they are exhausted from lack of sleep and shortage of food. They are ready to get tough and, at the very end of the story, they kill a totally harmless man because they think he has recognised them. When he goes to telephone his wife in a café, they are sure he is telephoning the police. The girls let themselves be arrested, and that is the end of it. But the whole project is a story with different levels of reading, from the first level, which is the story of these two girls having to find something to eat and somewhere to sleep, to the various sub-levels. The action moves all over Switzerland, with three-quarters of it being shot on the German side.

You once said, talking about *Charles, mort ou vif*, that you weren't really interested in making films about Switzerland. Do you still have reservations about the references to Switzerland in that film? Or has your attitude changed since then?

I still find that the references in *Charles* are a little too cute and easy. What I'm doing now, I think, is really going to be something completely different from the rest of my work. I thought that *Jonah* was the end of some kind of cycle and after it I really wanted to do something different, though it took me some time, spent reading and thinking, to know what I wanted to do. *Jonah* was based on a text: written ideas embodied in characters and so on. Now I want to do just the reverse, to start not from the text but from something much more material . . . the roadside, cafés, country. The girls have no theory about what they are doing. Absolutely none. They are not rebels and they just play a stupid game. Their only concern is with eating and sleeping. So this is really the starting point . . . and from here we go on to ideas which are somewhere at the end.

It really is the reverse of *Jonah*. I have no scripted dialogue for this one. We shall improvise. We shall also be much freer about what we want to do each day, depending on the weather and many things which we want to integrate into the actual act of filming. It's not that I want to base this kind of work on improvisation. It's more a reaction against having safe ground on which you walk. *Jonah* is very safe. Of course, there are always all sorts of incidents which you have to integrate into the work when you shoot a film. But still, there was a text there, and you knew exactly what you would say and do. With this new film there is an enormous risk, because it's quite a long film and nothing happens. There are small things, very repetitive in many ways, but nothing much happens for three weeks. I didn't want to cram events and stories into it.

More often than not, the iconography of the landscape is used as punctuation to various sections of the narrative. Are you saying that you are going to try to reverse this procedure?

Yes, of course. This will really be the first thing I look at through the camera. We know where we will be shooting, because we have to get ourselves organised . . . we have to sleep somewhere and I don't want to sleep in the woods. And neither does the unit. I'm still going around scouting for exact locations, but we're not going to end up saying each morning, 'Where are we going to shoot today?' We know that we are going to show this bit of road or that bit of mountain or that village. But still, it will depend largely on the way it looks on the day: what the weather is like, how the girls are feeling. It is going to be quite a tough job for the two girls, as they have had hardly any experience of film-making.

After you finished *Jonah*, you said that it was a kind of summation of your work and that it would be difficult to move on from there. Did you look on the TV series *Ecouter Voir* as a means of tackling problems that the narrative films had suggested?

Yes, partly. It was Francis Reusser who started it. He was interested in three-quarter inch video and Super-8 film. Then there was Loretta Verna plus Anne-Marie Miéville plus myself. We decided to try something together and approached Swiss TV to find out if they were interested. They *were* interested, not so much in what we wanted to show or make but in so far as the technique was concerned. They know that Super-8 film is out there somewhere and so is three-quarter inch video, but they have no one who can really experiment with it. So they gave us a little money to work with, and they also gave us complete freedom to do what we wanted. Verna and Miéville worked on Super-8 and video. Reusser worked solely on video in the studio. I worked only in Super-8. I was interested in shooting miles and miles of footage on roads, cafés and landscapes in Switzerland. So, in fact, that's what I did.

Non-narrative?

Yes. I didn't have one fixed idea of making a film. I decided that I would make a trip between Geneva and Berne, which is something that interests me very little because I've done it a thousand times and it bores me to

'Contre Coeur': 'They have a big gun and they have been threatening people . . .'

death. I can't even look out of the train window because I hate it so much. It's familiar and boring and something that I know too well, and I wanted to see what would happen when I filmed it. So I put the camera on the window of my car and shot I don't know how many Super-8 cassettes. And when I looked at it, it was quite fascinating to see. Most of it was shots of three minutes duration, the length of a cassette. I still don't know why it was fascinating. It was a kind of magic of film. Some of it was marvellous and beautiful, especially when we shot through storms, with very heavy rain.

In any event, I had this splendid footage and I didn't know just what to do with it. So I recorded bits of commentary, just like that, without writing it down. Some of it I did in my car with a little tape-recorder on the seat beside me. It was very poor sound quality, which I like. I organised this material, just simply going to Berne and back, according to the geography. I didn't cut it. I simply joined these three-minute segments together, end to end, and put those bits of commentary on top of it. In addition, I put music on top of the commentary so that it would be difficult to understand . . . So it is basically a rather strange and interesting combination of absolutely empty pictures which are at the same time absolutely crammed with information about emptiness, duration, time, the road, the lorries, etc. And I showed it like that, and nobody cared. Complete silence all round! (*laughter*)

Did the work you did on the series make the transition back to commercial film-making easier for you?

Actually it made it more difficult, because I realised that there was something there—in Super-8 and video. I didn't quite know how to go from there to fiction and how to integrate those experiences. Now, however, I can see the new film quite clearly in my head.

Do you ever feel that it might become impossible for you to continue working within the commercial system of production and distribution?

It's quite possible, yes. My position on that is not to be as radical as Godard, but to try to force the commercial world to open their doors to outside experiences. I don't know whether that is going to work or not, but we'll see. I don't make plans for the future. I work year by year and see what is possible. I know quite well how to make a film like *Jonah* again. I could repeat it, of course, make it even better. But I wouldn't be interested. Once you know how to make something, you have to make something else.

Do you regard each film as a sketchbook for the next one?

Not exactly. When you make a film, you want to feel that it is full and complete and finished. Each film is a sketchbook in the sense that you learn by making something, but the first things that you actually see when the film is finished, at least the first things that I see, are the mistakes. I am obsessed by that, and the first viewing of the film is the horror of seeing them all. After a while, however, even the mistakes are assimilated and you

Work, countryside and food: staples of Alain Tanner's cinema in scenes from 'La Salamandre', 'Le Milieu du Monde' and 'Jonah'

want to make another film to put them right or to avoid making them again. So I try to make each film the best I can; but when it's finished I realise how many things I have to correct if I want to make something better.

It seems to me that there is an enormous jump between *Charles* and *La Salamandre*, especially in terms of extending the concept of narrative. *Charles* strikes me as being the most . . .

Organic! It is, actually. It is very simple and organic in very many ways. But it has spirit. I saw the film again a year ago for the first time in quite a while. That spirit, of course, is due to a large extent to François Simon. But he couldn't have conveyed that in a bad film. I'm not saying that *Charles* is a good film . . . yes, I *am* saying it's a good film, because for Simon to be able to convey that spirit all the way through means that something had happened in that film. It's very simple and the ideas are easy; but there was something in it, and also in its simplification, which worked with the actor.

Jumping back for a minute to *La Salamandre*, you once said 'We don't want any tracking shots which will slide the spectator into reality.' What were you referring to there?

The fact that we didn't have any money to do tracking shots! No, actually the idea was that in classical narration the tracking shot is really there to make things look more real and lively and to follow the actors. It's used to create a feeling of movement and action in life. We refused to have any tracking shots in *La Salamandre,* although we could have had the cameraman moving or used a wheelchair, because of the narration and because of the style we wanted for the film. There is just one tracking shot, which is done by car when they are walking on the mountain road and which is a kind of reverse quotation from *Modern Times*. I didn't want to do it, but when we put those two on the road, with their clothes and so on, it was quite obvious that there was a pictorial similarity. So we decided to make it even more so.

You have an aversion to the idea of equating film language with 'reality'. Did that attitude come out of your experience in documentary film-making or was it present even at that early stage in your career?

I think I always felt like that, because when you work in documentary you are supposed to work from reality and to transmit that reality. And what I realised when I was making documentaries for TV, or 'reportages' on various social subjects, was that the interesting thing would be to make fiction out of that. Because of the process of selection and the impossibility of *really* showing the reality, among other things, I realised that it was already fiction. The last documentaries I did for television were completely fictionalised documents.

In terms of colour versus black and white, do you still think that the viewer interprets black and white as being 'more realistic'?

I think that's changed now. Colour has completely arrived of course in terms of production, and TV never shoots now in black and white. But colour TV is still relatively new in Switzerland, and as long as colour TV was something only a few people had, and only a part of the programmes were in colour, then black and white did seem the colour of reality. And to some extent of course it still is, because of all the documents from the past such as newsreels. But attitudes have now shifted in the reverse direction. Which, perhaps, is one reason I would like to go back to black and white. I enjoyed using colour for *Le Milieu du Monde,* but I didn't enjoy it for *Jonah*. The problem with colour is that, with the way the European film economy is structured today, you cannot work with a proper budget within the time period you are given. On French productions everyone works with the same stock, and when everybody is working on exactly the same stock throughout the year, nobody has time to think about light. So the result is that all the films end up looking alike: it's just colour and it's boring. Really to work properly with light and colour takes a studio—Resnais can do it, because he has twelve weeks there and he has money. But for everyone else, you shoot on location, you have to work fast with no time to think of the image, of the lighting, or of the way to use colour. You just use it because it's Kodak stock, in the camera. In those conditions, there's no satisfaction in using colour, and I'm against it not for reasons of principle but for reasons of practicality. With black and white, on the other hand, you can work without having big money and you can get something out of it. I recently saw *Adoption,* by Marta Meszaros. It's in 35mm, black and white, and absolutely splendid.

The problem with colour is also one that relates to audiences. For certain types of film, I'm sure that cinema audiences would quite willingly accept black and white. Certainly on TV they would, although TV is the worst enemy of cinema. The producers know that after a certain period of time they will be able to sell their films to TV; and of course there is not one TV station today that accepts black and white. In a sense, TV is now censoring the cinema at all levels. It's very difficult to get a proper budget for a film here, as it is in France, without involving television money. A few days ago, the TV producers were given the script for my current film and they said that it had been turned down by the reading committee because they couldn't show it at 8.30 in the evening. They said that if they put up the money, it must be for something that could be shown at prime time, to the widest possible audience, and not for the 10 p.m. audience, which is very small.

In France the whole business is going bankrupt, and there are very few producers left who will touch first films or films by young directors. So these people must go to television, and if television says that your film is not for the mass audience, then you've had it. Which is a fantastic way to censor the cinema.

Would the television producers offer you an alternative, giving you less money for the film if they were going to show it late at night?

No, they're not really interested. In my case, they still give me the money, because they have some kind of rather vague obligation to promote Swiss culture and to help the Swiss cinema. On those grounds, they said yes. We also have big problems with the rate of monetary exchange, since we co-produce the films with France. The Swiss franc is much too strong and much too high, and even if we get French producers to invest in a film that is to be shot in Switzerland, the money loses its value as soon as it crosses the border. Which means that in France they have to put more money in for the value of the product they get in the end. That's a big problem, so I told the TV producers that if we want to have Swiss films, even if they are co-productions, they will have to sustain the Swiss side of the production. I could have made this film with a 20 per cent Swiss share and an 80 per cent French share, but then the French producers will say, 'Make the film in France.' It's ridiculous. We can spend the money in France, but this is a film about Switzerland. So, I told them, unless you agree to construct Switzerland in the Boulogne studio . . . And that's why in the end they accepted. But no one really knows what they are going to do with the film, which doesn't have anything in it that would be harmful for an 8.30 audience. They will hate it, of course, but never mind. They'll probably show it at 9.30 and write it off as a loss.

I still think that the subtle means of censorship that accompanies European film and television co-productions is preferable to the situation in the United States.

In a way, however, it's better in the United States, because there television has reached a stage where it's just like water out of a tap. It's no more important than that really. McLuhan was right: the message really is the medium. What is wrong with European television is that it still thinks of itself as cultural and informational, when it isn't that at all because all content is equivalent and each message emulates the last one. So it's a big illusion that TV is a cultural medium, that it can give information, and so on. The way it is assimilated and watched by the audience is exactly the same on both sides of the Atlantic. People swallow everything. Information becomes fiction. Fiction becomes information. Every message is mixed up with the next one and the result is a kind of brainwashing and alienation of the people. The difference is that in America people *know* that television is like that. Here they still think of television as an element of the culture, which is absurd.

Television is still killing the cinema, taking audiences away partly by showing so many films that people prefer to stay at home to watch them. At the same time, however, television is incapable of producing one programme hour at the level of cinema. They need cinema, because that is where they get their biggest ratings. So they realise that they cannot kill it completely because they won't have anything left to show viewers. What they do now is invest in the cinema, and that is where the danger lies. They put the money into the cinema because they cannot spend it themselves; they cannot produce. And through that they censor the cinema, because what they want for television is a product that is uniform, standardised and easy. I am speaking here of subject matter. Cinema was getting quite free. You could say that the president of the republic was sleeping with the minister of justice and nobody would care. But you can't do that on TV.

What is more important, however, is that they censor the form of films. What they want is the classical kind of narration. Once you break away from that, they say that the audience won't understand. And that is the worst kind of censorship imaginable. ■

Chishu Ryu (right) in 'Late Spring'

Yasujiro OZU

Emotion and Contemplation

Don Willis

Late Spring (1949), directed by Yasujiro Ozu, is about a young woman (Setsuko Hara), nearing thirty, still living very happily with her widowed father (Chishu Ryu). She at first ignores, then almost virulently comes to resent the efforts of others to get her married. Eventually she yields, though her feelings are still unresolved. Throughout the film, Ozu makes her complex response to the impending separation from her father clear and vivid: fear and anger, a feeling of helplessness verging on panic, regret that she should cause so much trouble. The idea of letting go of her father is shattering to her, but he has to convince her that she must let go: one unstated reason—he will die some day, and if she stays on with him she will then be left completely alone. Dramatically, the film concerns the effect of the break on *her*. The father's response to her departure is withheld until after she has left; until the next to last shot in the film. After mechanically and methodically peeling an apple, he absently lets the peeling drop, and his head falls slightly.

Is it too much to suggest that Ozu and his scriptwriter Kogo Noda designed the film to set off this one shot? Perhaps it is—the shot is not the whole film. It does not, that is, so much sum up as complement the rest. The slight falling movement of Ryu's head is the suggestive emotional centre of *Late Spring*, as Setsuko Hara's great performance is the expressive centre. The emotion made explicit in the character of the daughter is implicit, in that one shot, in the father: the rupture will affect him as much as it does her.

In his scenes with Hara, Ryu invariably sits erect, kidding her, lecturing her, advising her, but never it seems openly revealing his own feelings, while in the latter half of the film she typically sits slumped, head bent in defeat. At the Noh drama, they spy the woman he says he intends to marry when his daughter herself is married. He smiles courteously at the lady and resumes watching the play. A look of resentment and disappointment comes over Hara's features; sullenly she bows her head as, with retrospective irony, she formally bowed during a tea ceremony at the very beginning of the film. Later, her father sits admiring her in her wedding costume. Her head bowed, partly perhaps by the weight of the costume, she thanks him, through tears, for 'everything'. Only alone, at the end, does he bow his own head.

If Ryu's bowing of his head is meant emotionally to balance and set off the whole of Hara's performance, it is also then, in a sense, a continuation of that performance, a reiteration of key moments in it. It is the key to character that is missing from earlier, rather frail Ozu dramas like *The Only Son*

(1936) and *There Was a Father* (1942), which seem distinctly inferior to early, essentially comic Ozu films like *I Was Born, But . . .* (1932) and *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (1941) and which too schematically oppose figures of duty (the mother in one film, the father in the other) with figures of sentiment (the son, in both films). The last scene in *Late Spring* respects and preserves Ryu's character—patient, selfless, stoic. It keeps his and Hara's characters quite distinct in kind, yet firmly links him with her.

The final shot of Ryu is followed by one of waves washing up on a beach. Throughout the film, the father's insistence on his daughter marrying has seemed harsh and unreasonable, almost inhuman; as the daughter's resistance has seemed almost pathological, *humanly* unreasonable. The final slump of his body is then the link between her humanity and the film's sense of the father as representative of an impersonal force or fate; specifically, it is the link between the images of Hara's bowed head and the last shot of the film—the waves, an image of cosmic incessancy.

At four different points in *Early Summer* (1951), characters sit and talk, or just sit, then stop and look off into the distance—at clouds, a balloon, a passing wedding procession—which images Ozu then shows. Like the last shot of *Late Spring*, these images, which exist outside the frame proper of the story, situate the characters in a wider context. Again a girl, Noriko (Hara), is urged by family and friends to marry and again she resists, if more cheerfully. The tone is lighter, the drama less concentrated, too diffused perhaps (even diluted) in comedy.

In one scene the mother and father sit side by side in a park eating lunch. She points out a balloon floating high in the sky. We see the balloon, and the father says, 'Somewhere a child is crying.' The mother responds, speaking of their son (played by Ryu), 'Remember how Koichi used to cry?' Through such triangulation—'crying child'/balloon/Koichi's past—Ozu charts the intangible: the passage of time, the relative significance (or insignificance) of past or present moments in a person's life. Distance in space and distance in time begin to seem indistinguishable. The shot of the now tiny balloon soaring higher and higher is like an intersection of the image of the hypothetical child (distant in space) and their thoughts of their own child (distant in time), a merging of past and present, personal and impersonal.

At another point, the mother longingly recalls her other son who died during the war, and the father observes, 'He won't return.' The mother then looks out, and we see banners flying in the wind. The shot is like an echo or a restatement of the father's words, objective, without inflection. It absorbs the emotion implicit in his words, and explicit in the mother's longing. It doesn't say 'This is good' or 'This is bad', simply 'This is'. Later, the father sits on a low wall, waiting for a train to pass. He looks up into the sky: we see a shot of clouds moving almost imperceptibly. There has been a rift in family relations—Noriko has decided on a husband without consulting her brother Koichi or her parents. The father may or may not be thinking about these matters: here are no particular words for the shot of the clouds to echo, no specific feelings or thoughts. Yet in the context of the film, the shot is not empty of meaning—or, rather, purpose. Like the shot of the banners, this one is in a way redundant, almost superfluous. It is like a blanket, general, 'This is'. It's the essence of the film: clouds moving, or a man watching clouds moving. Without such 'empty' images, *Early Summer* would lack a whole dimension of meaning. Like the final image of *Late Spring*, they are not so much abstracting meaning from the film as reflecting meaning back. Empty of meaning or purpose in themselves, they are charged with it by their context.

One outstanding sequence in *The Only Son* anticipates these images in later Ozu. The son, temporarily reunited with his mother, sadly confides to her, 'I wish I could have stayed with you in my home town,' and looks up. Ozu cuts to a shot of the sky. The son adds, 'The larks are singing,' and his mother also looks up: another shot of the sky. This is the informing sequence for those images of clothes and banners blowing in the wind which punctuate the film. 'The larks are singing' is clearly a verbal equivalent of these images of wind and sky, mere observation. But the structure and shot rhythm of the sequence also serve to set off and equate this line and the first one ('I wish I could have stayed . . .'). The sequence then is a shot rephrasing a line rephrasing a shot rephrasing a line, and giving each unit equal weight: 'wish'—sky—'larks singing'—sky. The particular emotion gives way to the general observation. Separation from loved ones, the sequence reads, is as inevitable and natural as the wind and the clouds. It does not say which element—the human or the non-human—is the more important. That would be either too assuming on the one hand or too unassuming on the other. 'The larks are singing' is, in context, another way of saying 'I wish . . .' It restates the obvious, the inevitable: larks sing, people hope.

Unfortunately, this sequence is left stranded in the film by the flimsy narrative, which too easily assumes the disappointment and evanescence of hopes and then too easily qualifies that assumption. (The son ekes out a living as a teacher; his mother, who worked to make him a success, finds that he is kind and, through a convenient accident, that even in poverty he is generous to others.) It is *Tokyo Story* (1953) in skeletal form. In the latter film disillusionment is not taken for granted or easily accepted. It's fought, resisted. The story does not fit a simple pattern of disappointment with qualification.

'Isn't life disappointing?' says the sister-in-law Kyoko in *Tokyo Story*. When Noriko (Hara) answers 'Yes, it is,' she is smiling—not a 'gracious, accepting smile' (Donald Richie), but a frozen, ironic one. She has just admitted that even she (who her mother-in-law thought so 'nice') may some day become unthinking; and she is soon to admit bitterly to her father-in-law (Ryu) that 'already' she is forgetting her husband, missing in action and presumed dead eight years before. The smile is double-edged: it is assenting but not accepting (either of herself or of others) and is not to be identified or confused with the last shot in the film, of the harbour, which *is* a shot of 'acceptance'—in perhaps its fullest sense, an acceptance of our *inability* to accept. Noriko's smile is one of defeat, an ironic admission that she shares her sister's bitterness: the last we see of her she is sobbing, with her face in her hands.

Kyoko: Noriko: the father Hirayama: the harbour—so an emotional graph of *Tokyo Story* might read. Or, from images filled with emotion to images empty of emotion. The last sequence recapitulates this general movement, with shots of Kyoko alone, then of Noriko, then of Hirayama and the harbour, then just the peaceful harbour. Or: open defiance, acceptance and points in between. As in *Late Spring*, Ryu's character reconciles the disparate elements. When his doctor son tells him that his wife will not live through another day, he mechanically repeats: 'So—not live . . . so—not live . . . so—this is the end.' There is a slight, ironic smile on his face, much like Hara's when she says 'Yes, it is,' and he seems to be looking not at anything in space but at the sound or meaning of his son's words. His elder daughter, standing beside him, breaks down and cries. Her response is immediate; her father's seems diffused over a lifetime. Neither is false. If the daughter represents the subjective fact of emotion, the father represents the objective fact. We see and feel through her in this scene but we only *see* him, as we see the shots of sky, cloud and harbour that punctuate *Tokyo Story*.

We first see the mother and father at home, sitting parallel to one another, facing the same way. At the end a virtually identical shot shows the father sitting in the same position—without the mother, who has died. Her absence from the latter shot is like the father's head falling at the end of *Late Spring*—it's observed fact, not expression or abstraction (e.g. 'loneliness'). Every other shot in the film may say that he will be lonely, but this shot says only that he's alone. It is the structure of the film that allows us to fill in the emotion: the shot itself presents only the bare fact. The father alone, the quiet harbour: two more instances of the inevitable. While we may feel these two shots to be extraordinary, we *see* only that they seem ordinary. The processes of feeling and observation begin to merge. The special, elusive experience of the end of an Ozu film like *Tokyo Story* is a distillation of qualities of emotion and contemplation, subjective and objective phenomena.

Ozu interposes two key bridging shots in the film, shots that visually and dramatically foreshadow the 'eclipse' of the mother. In the first she stands on a hill in long shot, watching and then following her little grandson around, offscreen right. She has been musing aloud about the future. ('Where will I be when you've grown up and become a doctor?') Later we see mother and father (again in long shot) on the great sea wall at Atami. He stands, starts to walk away, then turns to see her still sitting. He later realises that she apparently suffered a slight stroke then. The two are shot against the sea and sky and distant mountains, as she and her grandson were photographed against the sky. In their isolation of the characters against these vast natural backdrops, the two scenes are like an overlay of the subjective and the objective—like the father's 'So—not live . . .' Tiny in space, the characters also appear diminished in time, moments in an infinite span. The simple fact of the mother lagging behind her grandson and husband becomes, given the visual and dramatic context, a

wonderfully tactful, suggestive image of mortality.

Ozu's next film, *Early Spring* (1956), also deals with the relativity of time, space and situation. The situation is that of a fairly young white-collar worker (Ryo Ikebe) in Tokyo, and for him it is frustrating and unfulfilling. To two wartime buddies whom he meets at a reunion, however, his life as an office worker seems enviable in its regular pay and security. An old friend who is dying actually misses things like the crowded trains; while still another man, near to retirement, expresses great bitterness over a life wasted working in an office. A round of one-line comments and laments on their lot by the young workers themselves ends wryly with 'Our sole joy—noodles!' As in Jean Renoir's most Ozu-like film *The River* (made in India), no one character is the film-maker's spokesman. They all speak for him. *Early Spring* is not about office life in itself but about attitudes towards office life, mixed feelings of contentment, resentment and ennui.

At one point a secretary looks out of an office window and observes, 'Pretty sky. A week's so long.' Ozu cuts to a nondescript shot of building and sky. As in *The Only Son*, he splices together an objective and a subjective comment to form another sort of comment, *about* such objectivity and subjectivity and the resemblance of one to the other, the continuity between observation and emotion. At one remove, the subjectivity of emotion becomes an objective quality, as fixed and precise as the Tokyo skyline. At the end of *Early Spring*, the hero is transferred temporarily to the country (to learn 'the production end') and his wife rejoins him there after a period of separation. Looking out at a passing train which reminds them both of Tokyo, she says, 'Three years will pass quickly.' In the context of the film, they will and they won't; a week is long, three years are short. These are emotional gauges of time and place, and Ozu is unwilling to give precedence to emotional time over real time (just as, it should be added, he is unwilling to give precedence to real time over emotional time).

At the end of *Early Spring* husband and wife stand apart, expressionless in long shot, looking out at the countryside. He folds his arms, holding his elbows. Her arm falls to her side. This last shot says no more than that their three years in the country will pass. Visually and dramatically, the slight gestures the characters make are non-committal. They say nothing. They are like an ellipsis—or a question mark punctuating the line 'Three years will pass quickly.' They signal the completion of the film and signify not an attitude towards life so much as a rejection of any attitude, an unwillingness to see life from one angle.

Floating Weeds (1959), one of Ozu's least contemplative and most dramatic works (the near opposite in dramatic tone and pitch to *Early Summer*), concerns moral relativity, the kaleidoscopic qualities of personal relationships. It is about the everyday chaos of life seen too much from one angle—the purely personal—and about the awful and comical untenability of moral positions. An ageing actor (Ganjiro Nakamura) returns with his troupe to a remote island town and visits his mistress (Haruko Sugimura) and their son (Hiroshi Kawaguchi), who is at first unaware that the actor is his father. Jealous of this new/old rival for his affections, the troupe's leading actress (Machiko Kyo) (a) pays a girl (Ayako Wakao) to seduce the boy, but the two (b) fall in love and run away. When they return, the father (c) accuses the boy of deserting his mother; the boy in turn (d) learns that he is his father and (e) promptly rejects him as such; the girl (f) argues the boy into tentatively accepting him. The film is predicated on just such wrenching moral reversals, which argue less for more openness and flexibility than, impossibly, for the ability instantly to change one's whole way of life and thinking, for a superhuman malleability. The film is distinctly unreasonable.

The actress reacts violently to news of the actor's old mistress; the mistress takes the news of the actor's new lover calmly, with an understanding smile. The actor naturally finds the smile more attractive than the violence. But the two unlike reactions seem for Ozu and Noda to be a single comment, a denial of either approbation or condemnation; merely a suggestion that you can't have it both ways, that the world is not as understanding (or as consistent) as it should be. One of the actors, Kichi, at one point lectures two fellow actors contemplating robbing 'the boss' on loyalty to one's benefactor and talks them out of their scheme. Next morning it is discovered that Kichi has absconded with the boss's wallet, his friends' money and any item of value that wasn't nailed down. So much for didacticism.

Part of the intricate filmic/dramatic beauty of *Floating Weeds* lies in the way Ozu and Noda tighten, loosen, distil and in general deploy the narrative elements—comic, dramatic, atmospheric—so that one intersects, punctuates, extends and qualifies another. Ozu originally made the story as a silent, *A Story of Floating Weeds* (1934), which is itself quite good, and he retained many scenes and ideas in the remake. That the remake yet seems a much greater film is due partly to the fact that its dialogue is far more literate than the original's titles—titles like 'He just wants to be a great man' do not help the climactic sequence of the 1934 version, on which Noda did not work—and also partly to the remarkable performances of Machiko Kyo, Ganjiro Nakamura, Ayako Wakao and Haruko Sugimura, which insure the film's moral and dramatic breadth and depth. The fullness of their portrayals prevents any dramatic imbalance: together, their performances are like a non-committal Ozu coda, a dramatic 'This is'.

Spare where *Floating Weeds* is dramatically rich, *Tokyo Twilight* (1957) is still one of Ozu's most moving films, and perhaps the blackest and most desolate in tone. It concerns a family thrice ruptured: a mother (Isuzu Yamada) long separated from the father (Ryu); one daughter, Takako (Setsuko Hara), leaving her husband and moving back in with her father; the other daughter, Akiko (Ineko Arima), committing suicide after an abortion and a stormy reunion with her mother. *Tokyo Twilight* is decidedly pessimistic, where *Early Summer*, say, is optimistic. But the pessimism is understated, distilled in sounds and silences. The dialogue is for the most part functional. (There *is* one memorable line: after her elder daughter pays her a visit expressly to accuse her of causing the younger's death, the mother changes her mind in favour of moving north: 'I don't like Tokyo any more.') Generally, Ozu and Noda use dialogue to angle in on meaning, but in *Tokyo Twilight* dialogue is often at best counterpoint to the centre of a scene—the face of a person waiting for someone, or mechanically continuing an action (brushing hair, operating a pinball machine) as he or she absorbs a disquieting idea or piece of news (Akiko suspecting that she has seen her long-lost mother; the father informed that she has gone to a neighbour for a loan). The words in such scenes are unimportant—the scene is in the empty, compulsive action or in the face, the signs of internal turmoil.

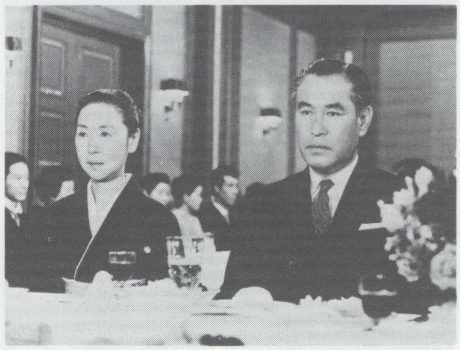
In *Tokyo Twilight* the film is, simply, in the face of Akiko, whether she is looking for her boyfriend, Kenji, or waiting for him, or crying after she asks him what to do about

'Tokyo Twilight'

the baby—her sobbing blending with the sounds of boat engines and muffled hammering from the harbour around her as she sits, almost motionless. The sounds and the image suggest finality, questions without answers. Akiko's set, unsmiling face dominates the film, cutting knife-like through its fabric. Ozu respects the character's dissatisfaction. He doesn't attempt to placate her. By juxtaposing her sobbing with the muted thudding of engines, he likens the end of her subjective world to the dull continuation of the objective world. By giving these disparate sounds equal weight, he gives her anger and despair their proper authority as objective fact.

Tokyo Twilight is unusually, unnaturally quiet for an Ozu film. The bland, functional dialogue, the silences, the cheerless black and white photography and the subdued, ironically lilting background music at once set off and mute the mood of despair. The meaning of the film rests in the pointed silences of the characters. Those silences are like psychic dead ends, intimations of defeat: the father at the pinball machine; Akiko refusing to answer his questions; Takako refusing to talk to her mother when she brings flowers for the dead Akiko; the boy stunned and silent after—Akiko slaps him and runs out; the mother waiting in the train compartment for Takako (who purposefully does *not* come to the station to say goodbye) as a military chorus sings in the background. (The latter an almost excruciatingly powerful scene of slowly extinguished hope, of irreconcilability.) These are the crucial, illuminative moments, revealing each character as essentially alone, helpless with his or her own feelings, like streams running down into nothing rather than out into the sea.

The chill melancholy of the film anticipates the air of anomie of characteristic late 50s/early 60s European films like *La Dolce Vita, The Fire Within* and *Eclipse* (and also recalls the chilliness of Val Lewton's study of a suicide, *The Seventh Victim,* 1943). All Ozu's films to some extent concern the effects of isolation and the dissolution of the family. But *Tokyo Twilight* is *only* about such isolation and alienation, and is not necessarily a lesser film than, say, *Tokyo Story* for its delimiting of subject. The muted sounds of a clock ticking, a train whistle or a dog barking late at night serve to underline the human silences at the heart of the film. The one sound that is not muted, that is perhaps even augmented, is that of a baby's rattle, which its mother, Takako, accidentally kicks once and which Takako's father picks up and shakes at the end of the film. That sound is the closest *Tokyo Twilight* comes to a note of hope. Yet in the context of shattered lives and seemingly unaccountable breakdowns in relationships, the too harsh sound of the rattle becomes itself—if not quite pessimistic—ambiguous. The end of the film leaves the viewer with an overwhelming sense of helplessness, a helplessness that comes from seeing these two people left alone after the tragedy of the daughter's suicide, *with* the tragedy of her suicide. As in *Late Spring,* we have been living with the daughter's anguish and forgetting that of the father (and sister); and at the end we are still on the outside looking in, at these strangely ambiguous people we now realise we hardly know, and will never know. For the film ends with the father on his way to work, 'like any other day'.



Variations on the theme of marriage in 'Early Spring', 'Equinox Flower' and 'Tokyo Story'

Equinox Flower (1958, Ozu's first colour film) and *Tokyo Twilight* are almost perfectly complementary works. Where the latter was conceived and shot in harsh black and white, *Equinox Flower* unfolds in bright, pleasant colour, and focuses on the father (Shin Saburi) rather than the daughter (again Ineko Arima, again usually silent). And, instead of a cold drama of irreconcilable differences, *Equinox Flower* is a warm comedy of reconciliation which brings its characters together as convincingly and movingly as *Tokyo Twilight* leaves them scattered and alone. At the beginning the film appears to be rather schematic and conventional—an Eastern 'Father Knows Best'—but it gradually turns into something closer to *The Searchers* (of all films), with Saburi as the unyielding, Ethan Edwards-like father who can't accept his own daughter and must have acceptance thrust upon him. (Ozu was a John Ford fan and most likely saw *The Searchers* between 1956 and 1958. Is this Ozu's only Western?)

Equinox Flower is one of the loveliest, most beautifully designed minor films ever made. It keeps broadening its thematic base, quietly and methodically annexing new meaning to itself and redefining its characters, deepening in tone and feeling until the term 'minor' loses all meaning. It explores territory that most film-makers don't even know exists. It is wittily deceptive, even underhanded, in its narrative design. At one point, Ozu and Noda even resort to an outright narrative lie that turns the film upside-down, or inside-out, and intentionally outrages our conventional ideas of characterisation. It is one film that's definitely not over until it's over—you can't outguess it. There always turns out to be more to it than you thought there would be.

In *Equinox Flower* Ozu and Noda don't repeat the mistake which they made in *The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice* (1952), of showing an abrupt change of character in one person. They leave the core of resistance in the father intact. In *Green Tea* the wife (Michiyo Kogure) simply gives in to the husband (Saburi). The completeness of her about-face is amusing ('Now even his most loathsome points fascinate me') but unresonant, unlike, say, that of the daughter in *Late Spring*. The intensity of Hara's happiness in the first half of *Late Spring*, and the intensity of her sullenness in the second half, seem together definitive of her character (as Ineko Arima's expressed disgust with life throughout most of *Tokyo Twilight* and sudden, last-minute surge of life seem definitive of hers). What the girl's paradoxical behaviour in *Late Spring* seems intended to imply is that at heart she *doesn't* change, that underlying the variable of her particular emotional state is the constant of her feeling for her father. But the wife's sudden accommodation in *Green Tea* merely ignores her previous inflexibility. The movie is admittedly quite entertaining both before and after her transformation, but the two halves don't really make a whole.

In *Equinox Flower* it is a fine point whether Saburi (wonderful as the father) really gives in or not. He simply does what he is instructed to do for his daughter and her marriage—or has it done for him— remaining at heart sceptical, if warily hopeful that he's wrong. Everyone else knows best here. All he need do finally for his daughter is smile—a small matter momentous in context—but the script leaves even that simple gesture implicit. Like *The Searchers, Equinox Flower* succeeds in making acquiescence seem a rare, mysterious and formidable act.

Late Autumn (1960), a reworking of *Late Spring,* with Setsuko Hara as the widowed Akiko and Yoko Tsukasa as her marriage-aged daughter Aya, is sometimes considered an inferior remake when it is actually a different kind of film—or a different approach to the same subject—and arguably as great a one. It lacks the basic lean dramatic beauty of *Late Spring,* but is as near perfection in its own, more indirect way. It is like *Late Spring* seen or held at one remove—as if Hara, the mother here, were looking at herself, the daughter of the earlier film. The clean, simple father-daughter polarity of *Late Spring* becomes in *Late Autumn* the near-infinite permutations of a mother-daughter relationship.

In *Late Autumn,* both mother and daughter are initially dismayed by the idea of the mother's proposed remarriage, yet they appear to come reluctantly to accept it. So it is doubly ironic that the soon-to-be-married daughter is heartbroken when she learns that her mother will not remarry after all, that she never intended to. When she breaks down and cries at the end, however, it is impossible to say if she is crying for what she has done to her mother (by leaving her alone), for what

she has done to herself (by giving up her mother) or for what her mother has done *for* her (by pretending she would remarry)—if these are tears of selfishness or selflessness, self-pity or just release. She is, in effect, crying for all these reasons; and, as with the girl's silences in *Tokyo Twilight* or the father's at the end of *Late Spring*, it is just this opacity of emotion that appears to be Ozu's goal.

Seen from this distance, a person appears subject to uncountable emotional currents, cross currents, undercurrents; intertwined emotional causes and effects. There is the fact itself—the separation of mother and daughter—and its myriad implications. At the end of *Late Autumn*, Ozu isolates the fact of Akiko's solitude, but he can only suggest, through the smile that slowly forms on her face, what that solitude will mean to her. Hara and Ozu can't quite present the person whole, but they can suggest the whole. They give us necessarily imprecise signs of emotion, fragmentary clues to character. *Late Autumn* is character as jigsaw puzzle, with tantalising missing pieces—the characters' silences, the film's empty spaces.

Ozu's film concerns the mystery of the human essence, and much of it is devoted to the surmises, opinions, machinations and viewpoints of those around the mother and daughter, including Aya's friend Yuriko and three friends of her late father. As in *Citizen Kane*, each observation or comment presents the two women in a new, slightly different light. The goal is not so much truth or completeness as an appreciation of the elusiveness of truth. The most 'dramatic' scene—Akiko 'rhapsodising' about her late husband when it is suggested she should remarry—is not even shown, only related in dialogue. We see the two main characters principally through the other people—further, the implication is that we see them through our eyes, or through Ozu and Noda's. Our conception or impression of a character in a film is ultimately just that—*our* conception—and not the character itself, who is necessarily filtered through our subjectivity and is thus distorted, however slightly. We can't quite know others (or ourselves): this is the sense of the character of the father in *Late Spring* (and of the Ryu characters in general in Ozu), and the sense of *Late Autumn* as a whole.

The four friends serve a dual purpose. They are half-callous, half-conscientious manipulators. Their scheming separates, unites, provokes Akiko and Aya. Fate-like, they determine the 'plot'. They are also extensions of the two women. Yuriko, for instance, shares their distaste for second marriages (her own father remarried), but is more 'realistic' on the subject. Her disloyalty to her mother, however, is balanced by loyalty to Aya and to *her* mother, whom she promises to visit often after Aya leaves. This sense of almost comically convoluted, conflicting loyalties to oneself, one's parents, one's offspring and one's friends is strangely crystallised in one simple action: angry at her for approving her mother's remarriage, Aya orders the concerned Yuriko out of the apartment. Reluctantly, Yuriko leaves, but as she walks away she whirls around, pausing momentarily, and only then departs for good.

That moment of hesitation is like a miniature of the conflicts of mother and daughter. It suggests, in its quirky conciseness, how it is possible for Aya, at two different

'Late Autumn': the two women at home; the three friends in one of Ozu's many bar scenes

times, to respond very differently to the idea of her mother remarrying; why Akiko wants/does not want Aya to marry; why Ozu can't explain to us exactly why Aya cries. Taken separately, Aya, Akiko, Yuriko and the three older men reflect each other's inconsistencies and sense of divided loyalties, or split affinities. Together, they are like a fantastically detailed, permutated composite character—mutually enriching analogues of each other that form one master portrait. For all this detail, however, Ozu is finally forced to come back to Hara's suggestive smile at the end of the film, that ironic smile which intimates that there are still many details that he has left out of the portrait.

Ozu's last completed film, *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962), is similar in story and structure to *Late Autumn*—too similar, perhaps. It is always a source of amazement how many formal and narrative elements Ozu repeats from film to film, and yet how distinctive each one is as a whole—no one, really, like another. Only *An Autumn Afternoon* of Ozu's later films seems to me to have no clear identity of its own; to be, in its almost rote reshuffling of the elements, simply reminiscent of earlier films in story, structure, scene and character. It is comparable to Hawks' *El Dorado* as a relaxed, enjoyable 'summing-up' of its director's career, in its consequently inflated reputation, its mongrel appeal. Its closing note—Ryu sitting alone and drunk in the kitchen, in long shot, after his daughter's wedding—is a typically memorable Ozu ending. But even this coda has an air of forced variation, as though Ozu and Noda did not want to repeat themselves, or not *exactly*. What they do here they do well; it's just that they did it before and better, with more sense of form and purpose.

Only one moment stands out as unqualifiedly brilliant, the cut near the end from the longer to the closer shot of the daughter's empty mirror, which is like an effect of memory, like the room's memory of its former occupant or, more precisely, like a recollection of the father's emotion upon seeing his daughter standing before the mirror in her wedding gown—not *his* recollection of the moment but *a* recollection, pure, uninflected, detached from the moment and yet of the moment. It is like a conjunction of human and non-human worlds, an acknowledgment of one world by the other. Nothing in Ozu could have quite prepared us for that cut and shot.

In one unfortunate way, *An Autumn Afternoon* did represent a new departure for Ozu. Alone of his late films, it is almost exclusively peopled by the 'mean', 'mediocre' creatures that his detractors (and even some of his defenders) say always was Ozu's speciality. The ordinary, mean or simply less than extraordinary characters that appear in his earlier films—the children in *Tokyo Story*, say, or the mistress' daughter in *The End of Summer*—are merely part of the natural diversity of character in those films, a diversity that includes several Setsuko Hara characterisations which qualify as among the most extraordinary creations in film. But *An Autumn Afternoon* is filled with unthinking, peremptory fathers, brothers and husbands, whose 'selfishness' too schematically makes loving wives and daughters stern, snippy and pettily dictatorial, in turn driving the weak-willed men to drink. As with *There Was a Father* and its characters strait-jacketed by fate, this seems less a bleak or honest view of life than a narrow one. In the context of this circumscribed world, even Ozu's pay-off images—the daughter in her wedding gown, the father alone—lack their customary resonance.

The characters in *An Autumn Afternoon* seem redundant rather than, like those in *Late Autumn*, amplificatory. The film needs a little fire, like the Ineko Arima of *Tokyo Twilight* or the Machiko Kyo of *Floating Weeds*. The points Ozu scores (especially with Mariko Okada's daughter-in-law) are often devastating, but they are usually small points about envy, obliviousness, pettiness. Here he takes that clearly defined attitude towards life and human nature that he scrupulously avoids in *Early Spring*, *Floating Weeds*, *Late Autumn*, etc. The muted pessimism of *Tokyo Twilight* becomes an easy cynicism. The characters in *An Autumn Afternoon* are seen in only one light, and Ozu too tightly controls the amount of illumination.

A final point: all the people in the film talk about loneliness. One old man describes himself as 'all alone'. When he passes out drunk, a friend warns the father: 'Beware—that could be you.' His son tells him, 'You'll be lonesome when she goes.' Near the end a woman asks him, 'But won't you be lonely?' Finally, drunk, he admits to himself, 'Yes . . . all alone in the end.' These admonitions and admissions could be seen as the characters' collective, vain attempt to confront and dispel the fact of loneliness, but they seem closer to superfluous comments, a thematic tipping of the hand. In *Late Spring* the imminence of the father's solitude is

submerged in the drama of cleaving father from daughter. His sudden solitariness is almost a shock, when of course it was the film's inevitable, *tacit* conclusion. The talk about loneliness in *An Autumn Afternoon* seems intended to fill a dramatic or aesthetic void—there is simply nothing else for the characters to talk about.

The End of Summer (1961) is from one angle a justification of selfishness; from another, a statement about one's responsibility for one's own life; from yet another, a statement on the basic immutability of character. 'It's his character'; 'Character? You mean he can do as he pleases?'; 'It's your life': these are representative lines. Concepts of self, self-interest and responsibility intertwine. At the centre is the fact of death: because one has only one short life one cannot entrust it to another person.

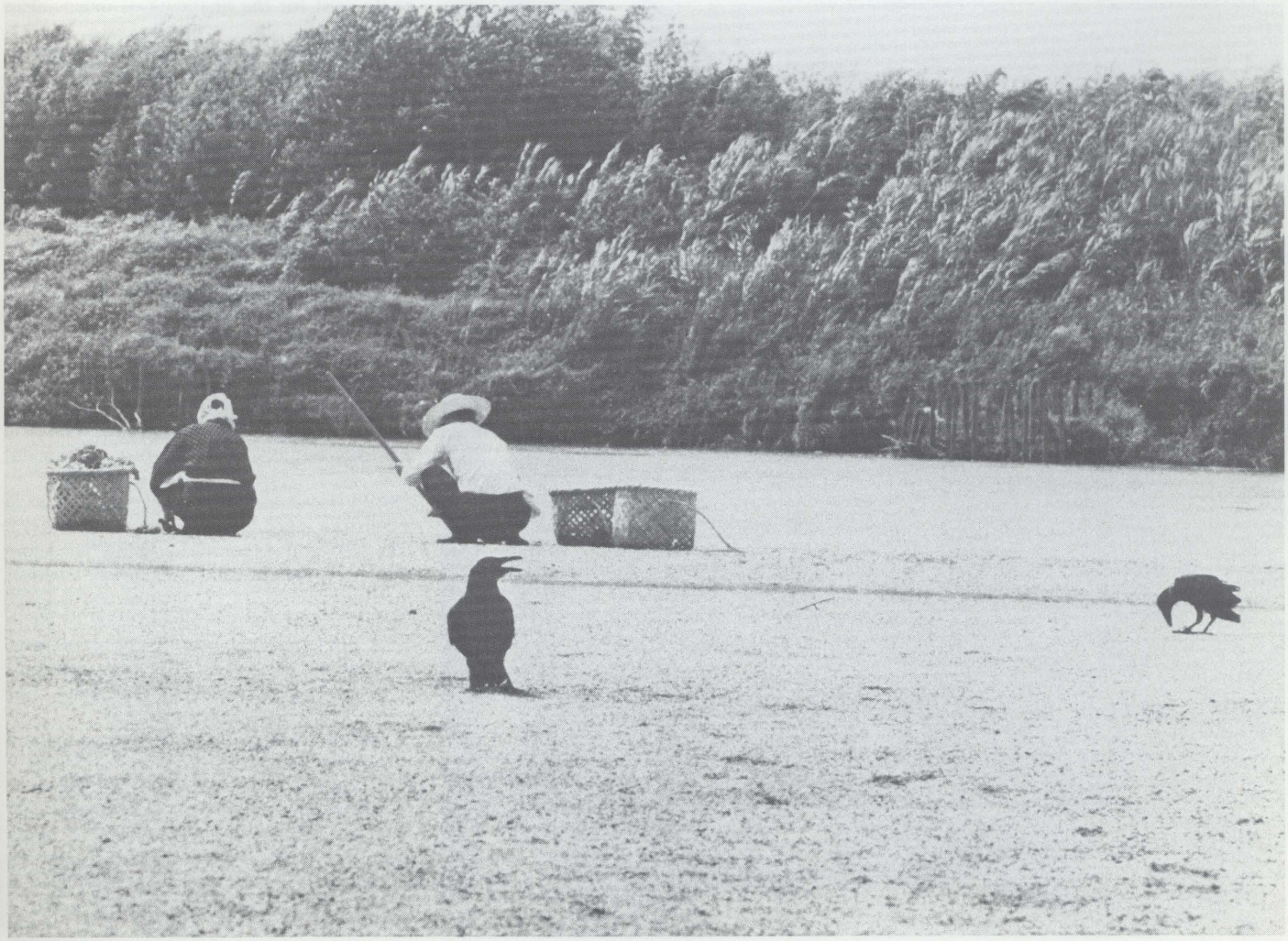
The two key images isolate the two independent-minded sisters of the Kohayagawa family, Akiko (Setsuko Hara) and Noriko (Yoko Tsukasa). In the first the family is watching from the house as smoke rises from a crematorium chimney—the father's body is being cremated—while Akiko and Noriko watch from the vantage point of a nearby hill. Then in the last sequence the two walk side by side, stopping and falling behind the funeral procession to conspire about their futures, then walk on, and Ozu cuts to shots of crows, harbingers of death. The sisters refuse to marry simply for 'the good of the family', whose business is failing, and in relation to the family this refusal is seen as selfish and divisive. In relation to the fact of death, however, their refusal is seen as necessary, urgent. Their 'selfishness' is, on another level, an acceptance of responsibility for fashioning the shape of their lives. The periodic shots of the sisters side by side, kneeling or standing in unison, are exquisite yet ultimately ironic images of accord—ironic because their personal accord means discord for the family as a whole. Their smiles of mutual agreement are subtly inverted subversion: they agree to disagree.

The film is so light and charming on the surface—but the last three shots are of the crows. A peasant (Ryu) at one point comments, 'New lives replace old', but the film does not conclude with cyclical images of rebirth but, like *Citizen Kane,* with images of finality and death. New lives replace old, but they are *different* lives. In one scene the whole family rushes into the frame to see the old man, abruptly recovered from a severe heart attack, up and about and refreshed by his 'sleep'. Later, Ozu shows the family again crowding into the frame, this time to see the smoke from the crematorium. This 'double exposure' is like an image of the fact of death, and what it means in this one case. The idea of rebirth expressed by the peasant is an abstraction; death is a fact, and while the two sisters may recapitulate their father's life in spirit, Ozu implies that it is the fact of his death that is his chief legacy to them.

Ozu once said (specifically with reference to *Late Autumn*), 'I want to make people feel without resorting to drama.' Many of his films, indeed, have no definable dramatic centre, only an aesthetic centre or an a-dramatic form—*Late Autumn, The End of Summer, Tokyo Story, Early Summer, Early Spring*. Only *Late Spring, Floating Weeds* and *Tokyo Twilight* could be said to have really strong dramatic centres, the first and third in one character (in both films the rebellious daughter) and the second in several characters. *Equinox Flower* has a sound comic-dramatic centre in the character of the father; *Green Tea* a faulty dramatic centre in the wife; *There Was a Father* and *The Only Son* arbitrary dramatic bases and *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947) a slight, if rather winning dramatic base.

That these works fall roughly equally into the dramatic and a-dramatic categories suggests that what Ozu disliked about drama was not necessarily the idea of drama itself but what it might imply—the primacy of emotion—either in reference to the characters in his films or to the viewer. He wanted the viewer to see as well as feel, as in the films themselves he tried to achieve a parity between the subjective and the objective, a continuity that would deny the importance of neither. Concentrated in drama, or emotionally diffused, the power of Ozu's films derives from this equation of emotion and contemplation, the objectification of emotion that finds human happiness, unhappiness and loneliness interchangeable with phenomena like ocean waves, breezes, the singing of birds, death; that likens a girl's sobbing to harbour sounds and acknowledges and respects at once both a subjective and an objective world. ■

'The End of Summer'



THE SETTING UP OF NIGHTHAWKS

Allan T. Sutherland

Any independent British fiction feature is a rare phenomenon. But Ron Peck and Paul Hallam's *Nighthawks* is particularly unusual in that it belongs to that small group of features which are neither made within standard commercial structures nor subsidised by grants from bodies such as the BFI Production Board or the Arts Council. The history of how *Nighthawks* was set up, and why it took over two years to raise the production money, therefore reveals a good deal about the way films get made in this country and the limitations of such structures as do exist for the financing of independent productions.

Nighthawks is about a homosexual schoolmaster, Jim, and the contrast between his role as a geography teacher and member of staff of a secondary school and his night-time life of gay clubs and discos and casual pick-ups. A growing friendship with a woman supply teacher, Judy, leads to increasing tension between these two roles. In the two outstanding sequences of the film, Jim finally 'comes out' at school.

The first of these sequences is a car drive, following a school dance which Judy has persuaded Jim, against his will, to attend. She has kissed him and he has lost his temper at her for doing so and for insisting that he go to the dance in the first place. As he simmers down, Jim talks with Judy during the drive and at a motorway service area, about his past and the fact of his homosexuality. The second sequence is a classroom scene, in which Jim responds to the question 'Sir, is it true that you're bent?' by telling his pupils that he is homosexual and answering their questions about it. (He is later reprimanded by the headmaster for having done so.) This scene possesses an extraordinary naturalness, perhaps as a result of the fact that, while some of the questions were planted, many were raised by the kids themselves.

Nighthawks has attracted a certain amount of adverse criticism for failing to present a more optimistic picture of gay life. This is to my mind unjustified: the film presents, without sentimentalising, the reality of many men's lives, and examines the crucial question of what is involved for someone working in a job where acceptance of homosexuality cannot be taken for granted. It is in my

opinion a film which stands as an important independent production in its own right, rather than as a purely gay film for ghetto audiences.

The origins of *Nighthawks* can be traced back to 1974, when Ron Peck, working at the London Film School with the three fellow-students with whom he was later to set up the film-making group Four Corner Films, made *Its Ugly Head,* a twelve-minute film about a repressed homosexual lecturer living with a bedridden woman writer. Because this was the first time Ron Peck had expressed ideas about being gay, the film acted as a catalyst to his own thinking and rapidly made itself redundant in the process. 'It pretty quickly seemed an inadequate picture of anything . . . So almost immediately afterwards I started thinking what could be done and I kept thinking of the gay disco scene, as just the scene I was familiar with.' Ron Peck was also conscious at this time of wanting 'to make a film within a certain tradition of film-making which was definitely narrative cinema.' The first notes he wrote down were about the car drive, which he then envisaged in a form considerably different from that which it was later to assume; as originally written, the scene contained much more violent emotion.

These ideas led to an application to the BFI Production Board in November 1975. The twenty page submission contained: a description of the reality of the situation, using a specific teacher as an example; a section outlining the proposed style of the film; a description of its narrative structure, oscillating between school and disco; some drawings of how certain scenes might appear; a budget, then estimated at £22,000. Drafts of this submission had been circulated for discussion among various groups and individuals including teachers, independent film-makers, feminists and gays (particularly the Gay Left collective, of which Ron Peck was a member). 'There was a definite propagandist aspect to it. There was a definite attempt to show that gay people were in all walks of life. I remember making the case that the films I'd seen up to that date were mainly presenting such people as artists, or presenting gay places as exotic locations, or as a joke to be laughed at. It was in a way to make stronger the idea of our normality.' (Ron Peck).

This submission was not a full script, and both the film's producers are emphatic about the difficulties posed by the fact that funding bodies devote their resources to production, and give little help towards script development. 'I think there's obviously a problem in submitting more than that at that stage. In a way what one needs is a script development period before actually applying. I think had we applied [to the BFI] the following year, with all the work that we'd done by then it would probably have been a lot easier. But you can't submit a huge amount without having had a period to work on it beforehand. For a film like this, at any rate, which did require a lot of research, talking to different people, there's an awful lot of running around to be done before really submitting anything about it.' (Paul Hallam). It should perhaps be noted that the fact that *Nighthawks* did eventually go into production owes as much to all the individuals who sustained the project through two years with small donations of money and practical help to enable such running around to take place as it does to the backers who eventually helped provide the production money.

In January 1976 Ron Peck had a meeting to discuss the application with Peter Sainsbury, the BFI's Head of Production, who, typically, was to provide a degree of support to the project that went considerably beyond the call of his official duties, even after the application had been turned down. 'There's no question that Peter Sainsbury as an individual has been a real mainstay right through, whenever he could help. Towards borrowing equipment, towards all sorts of things. As a reference. He was instrumental, I think, in helping us get the ZDF money.' (Ron Peck).

In the same month an article about *Nighthawks* appeared in *Gay News,* outlining the intended scope of the project and asking for people to participate in the production. This was to have a major influence on the development of *Nighthawks*: over 200 letters were received, all offering help. Some of these offered specific skills—as actors, writers, technicians—but a large proportion came simply from people who felt that they wanted this film to get made. 'I have just read the article in *Gay News* concerning your proposed film *Nighthawks* and would like to offer my services in any way I can. As an actor, as an extra or helper, whatever you require . . . I am a local councillor sitting on an Education Committee and am only too familiar with the prejudices there are in declaring one's homosexuality, particularly when you are associated with the education of children,' read one typical letter.

One of the people who wrote in was Paul Hallam, who rapidly became very closely involved in the project. Almost all the letters were followed up with interviews and conversations or meetings at specific locations such as the now defunct Brixton Gay Centre. Though the other members of Four Corner Films were to play important roles in production (Joanna Davis, camera; Wilfried Thust, lighting; Mary Pat Leece, co-editor), they had other commitments, and also a feeling that, as non-gays, they were inevitably to some extent outsiders to the project. As *Nighthawks* started, following the *Gay News* article, to develop from an individual project into a group project, it simultaneously began to assume an identity distinct from the work of Four Corner Films.

In April 1976 the application to the BFI was turned down. No detailed reasons were given for the rejection. 'They had 200 applications' (the normal average is about 160) 'and I think it was quite a difficult year for the Production Board, because they were under fire to express what their policy was. I believe that because they had so many applications they weren't able to spend more than about fifteen minutes on each one in discussion. All we really knew was that it was a fairly even split on it and that it ultimately went against, before the shortlisting stage.' (Ron Peck).

Though providing explanations of rejections would inevitably create substantial extra work for the Production Board, their failure to do so must I think be seen as short-sighted. It should not be the role of the BFI to act like a commercial production company who take no interest in film projects outside the question of whether they will finance them themselves. In so far as rejected projects can be carried on by other means, the Production Board should see it as part of their duty to give unsuccessful applicants whatever information may help them to get their films made. The reasonable argument that it would not be desirable to have a situation where film-makers specifically tailored their projects to make them acceptable to the Production Board is not strong enough to outweigh the individual film-maker's right to know whether the weaknesses implied by the rejection of his application are such as he might wish to correct, in order to increase the chances of getting the film made or simply to improve the film.

In retrospect, it seems that one reason for the refusal was that one element of the film outlined in the submission was a concern with modes of representation. The film was to start in a cinema, using a clip from Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place*; the relationship with the woman teacher was to be presented in a style much closer to traditional Hollywood modes than the rest of the film. This was felt to be confusing by members of the Board. This element was largely dropped at an early point in the scripting. It should therefore be made clear that the project rejected by the

Above: Paul Hallam discusses a scene with Richard Krupp and Keith Cavanagh. Left: Ken Robertson (Jim) at school, and offset with Rachel Nicholas James (Judy)

Production Board did not represent the film that was finally produced, but a different, and probably less viable, film.

A decision was made to go ahead with *Nighthawks* by seeking alternative forms of finance. This decision was strongly influenced by the response to the *Gay News* article and by support from the other members of Four Corner Films. An immediate fund-raising campaign was launched, and small donations from friends and from readers of articles published in the gay press and *Time Out* enabled the group to reproduce and mail more than a hundred booklets about the film. These were sent to 'people who it was thought might be responsive'. Approximately seventy people replied, few of them unhelpfully. These included directors and producers, figures such as Richard Craven of the Association of Independent Producers and Bill Borrows of the ACTT, journalists and film critics, as well as prominent homosexuals.

Locations for the film were offered free, and a group was set up to photograph these. A core of about 25 people started to take part in video workshops aimed at seeking a style for scenes deriving from the experience of those involved. These workshops and subsequent screenings of the tapes produced helped to determine the structure and content of the film.

Ron Peck and Paul Hallam started work on a complete script, which rapidly went into a second and then a third draft. 'The two of us would write something, and then it would be read by a number of people who came in and made notes, and then we'd actually have a discussion. In fact we discussed three or four times with a group of six before we wrote anything as an actual script. One shouldn't lose sight of how important that was.' (Ron Peck). Particular difficulties were posed by the question of how to reconcile the documentary aspects of the film with a fictional narrative. The film was at this stage still envisaged as covering more aspects of the gay world and focusing less intently on the life of a single character than eventually proved to be the case.

A number of people from within the film industry suggested that an application be made to the National Film Finance Corporation. Accordingly, following the completion in July 1976 of the third draft of the script, an application was made to the NFFC in August. This had been very carefully prepared, and included: the script; letters of support from film producers and distributors well established in the industry; letters from distributors in Britain, the USA and Australia expressing their intention to distribute the completed film; photocopies of a number of articles about the project; videotapes and colour stills showing scenes and specific shots as they might appear in the film; a budget, now estimated at £60,000; evidence of past work in the form of Four Corner Films' *On Allotments*, which had been chosen for screening at that year's Edinburgh Film Festival; evidence of the commercial success of films, such as *A Bigger Splash* and *Saturday Night at the Baths*, which had been exploited commercially as 'gay films'. In September Ron Peck and Paul Hallam had an interview with Sir John Terry of the NFFC. They were told that the NFFC could not consider backing *Nighthawks* unless it had a pre-production guarantee of major circuit distribution. Ron Peck is emphatic in his disagreement with such an attitude: 'If the NFFC and the provisions of the Eady Levy, which is the percentage a British producer gets back to stimulate production, were working in the way in which I imagine they were supposed to work, then it seems to me that, if they were financing films that cost on average say £100–300,000, then they could actually make something like twenty films a year, whereas they were when we applied financing about three films a year. The government initiatives to stimulate production are not working, and they could work.'

Attitudes similar to the NFFC's were expressed by British commercial production companies. 'It was specifically stated by British Lion that there were not known directors, not known actors, so how on earth could they invest money in it? The shortsightedness of that was obvious to us then and could be obvious to them in retrospect, but in fact I'm sure it would be just as hard now for someone else to do it as it was for us then . . . I think the thing we've learned, and it's something to fight about in the future, is that the film industry as it's set up doesn't seem to have any accommodation at all for this kind of production.' (Ron Peck).

Following the NFFC rejection, a gloomy emergency meeting was held at Four Corner Films. There was no money left other than a £500 loan, and three possible options were considered: to abandon the project; to continue it on video, raising money later to transfer the recordings to film; to shoot a test sequence in 16mm colour and hope that could be successfully used to raise investment in the film. The third option was overwhelmingly agreed upon.

In November 1976 a gay disco was reconstructed at the London Film School and seventy minutes of film were shot on a disco sequence, a cinema sequence, scenes in a flat and in a car. The fourteen minute pilot, made for £1,200—a remarkable achievement in itself—was completed in January 1977 and shown to potential investors, to those involved in its making and others trying to find ways in which the group could raise finance. Throughout the year, the pilot was shown to various groups for discussion and criticism.

An appeal in December to one of the project's sympathisers, who was to become the representative of all the British investors, had raised £960 to finance a period of uninterrupted rewriting of the script. A fourth draft was completed and circulated in April. The first investment, £10,000, was offered, supplementing an earlier offer by Don Boyd of invested facilities (such as use of a music studio and of a cutting room). At the same time, a further revision of the budget brought it up to £80,000.

The idea of resubmitting the project to the BFI Production Board was considered at this time, but abandoned for the reason that it was not felt possible to produce the film as now envisaged within the BFI's budget limitations. Though co-production might have proved an acceptable alternative, no precedent existed for this—a situation which has since changed, with the financing of Chris Petit's forthcoming *Radio On*, which is partly funded by German money raised through Wim Wenders' company Road Movies.

The process of negotiating for private investment continued throughout the year. In June a fund-raising dinner was held, where Ron Peck talked about the project; those present included people from the music industry, the film industry and wealthy families, all of whom were expected to have an interest in a film about being gay in London now. This produced offers of two further investments. Peck and Hallam had meanwhile had to take jobs to support themselves while continuing to work on the project. Following an approach to the French Institut National de l'Audio-Visuel, Hélène Vager from INA visited Four Corner in July. Having looked at the pilot, some of the videotapes and Four Corner's other film work, she suggested a further meeting in Paris. Ron Peck went to Paris in August; the INA meeting having been postponed until September, he used the intervening period to approach various French producers, but met with the response that if he wanted the film to do well in France, he should make it overtly pornographic.

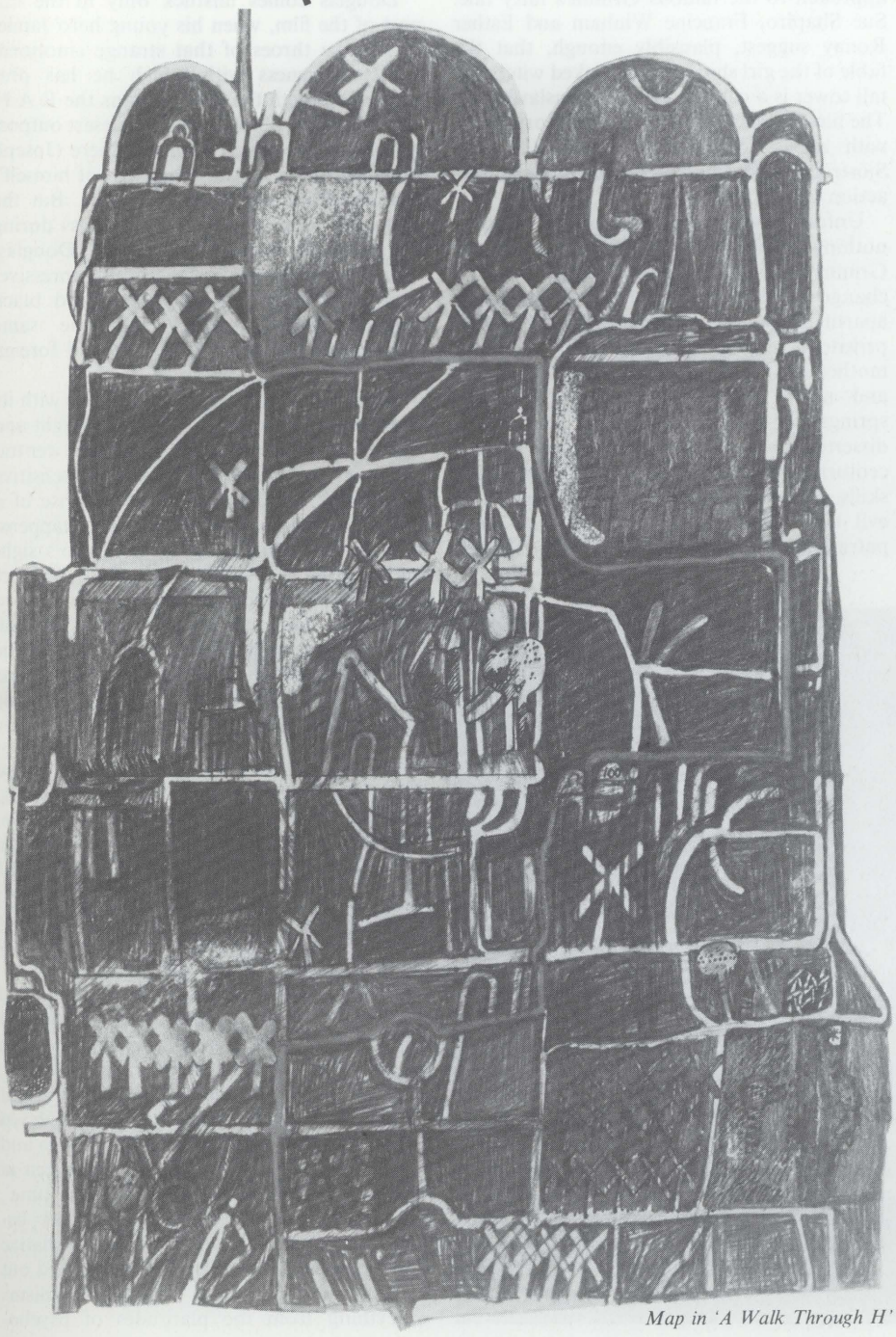
He took to the INA meeting a similar package to that submitted to the NFFC a year earlier. This time, it met with a much more favourable response: later in the month INA offered £7,000 if a matching sum could be raised elsewhere. ZDF German television was suggested and talks took place between INA and ZDF.

On the strength of unofficial news in October that ZDF was definitely interested in the project, tentative bookings were made of locations, the formation of a company, Nashburgh Limited (set up the following month) was investigated, and a full crew put together. A lot of work went into finding the right person to play the central character. Contracts with ZDF were signed in November and, following interviews of forty people and video tests, the central character was cast. The INA offer was reduced in December to £4,400. The British investors increased their investments and this offer was not taken up. Daily workshops and preproduction work continued. To avoid the massive copyright fees that would have been incurred by the use of current releases in the disco scenes, the classical composer David Graham Ellis accepted the task of writing and recording sixty minutes of disco music within ten days. Given the impossibility of filming in actual discos, for financial reasons and fear of invasion of privacy, the London International Film School was taken over once again for the reconstruction of the 'Back Streets' disco. Shooting started in January 1978.

Nighthawks received its first public screening at the 1978 Edinburgh Film Festival, which was followed by screenings at the London Film Festival, and it opens shortly at the Gate Cinema in London. But the fact remains that it has taken three years for the film to reach this point, and need not have done so if adequate structures existed in Britain for financing independent films. 'I think we could have done all the useful work that we did for the project in a good, properly financed, year,' Ron Peck sums it up. 'It makes you angry that it did take two years to raise that amount of money. It's quite likely that the film will recover that in its London run, and therefore that money is recoverable and one needn't have struggled so hard to get it, even in commercial terms.' ■

PRODUCTION BOARD FILMS

Nigel Andrews



Map in 'A Walk Through H'

For some years now, doomwatchers have been pointing a gloomy finger at the British Film Institute Production Board, and suggesting that no film-maker who goes through the vetting process can produce personal, untrammelled work unless his aesthetic and political views are happy enough to coincide with those of the Board. There seems little doubt that the current bias of that body, judging both by the films they support and the policy declarations they issue, is politically left-wing and cinematically mesmerised by the notion of a 'British film culture'. That second item gives cause for concern—more so than the first. There are two ways in which 'British film culture' may be interpreted. One is to understand by that phrase the idea of a continuous, evolving flow of creativity, that spontaneously forms its own history and traditions. The other is to see in it the concept of a kind of invisible fortress, its parameters already set and measured, into which new films must be seen to fit. Over the second definition hovers the dread philosophy of the 'Context'.

Which notion does the Board subscribe to? The new samples of their wares leave one in some doubt. The good news is that the two shortest films of the six I saw were among the most inventive I have ever seen from the Board—indeed from any British independent film-makers—while a third film, Bill Douglas' *My Way Home*, goes on its frugal and uniquely idiosyncratic way without a nod in the direction of what is cinematically or ideologically *à la mode*.

The bad news is that the remaining three full-length films—*In the Forest, The Life Story of Baal* and *Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair*—do give one the feeling that ideological acceptability has overridden artistic merit. The first film is a dour, didactic piece about the unchanging verities of peasant life in past centuries of English history. The second is a stilted adaptation of Brecht's play about an eloquently malcontent wastrel poet. The third is a feminist interpretation of Grimm's fairy tale.

In the Forest, directed by Phil Mulloy, presents the thorniest problem of the three films. It is more striking in conception than the other two, but it is also characteristic of the kind of film-making towards which the Production Board seems to be showing disproportionate favour these days. Like the recent *Justine*, it is an essay in 'deconstruction'. It takes a dramatic form shaped by years of cultural habit and moral preconception—in this case the historical epic—and tries first to dismantle, then to reassemble it. The title is an implicit, and politically loaded, antonym to 'In the Town' or 'In the House'; telling us that what we are seeing is the primitive underbelly of English society, from the Middle Ages to the Peterloo Massacre; a life as shapeless, diselemented and basically unchanging (the ragged costumes of the peasants in the film remain much the same throughout the centuries) as the town dweller's or the rich man's is purposeful, progressive and 'civilised'.

'History,' the film's narrator tells us, 'is a fable agreed upon.' And the chief signatories to this agreement are the rich, the educated and the literate, into whose hands falls the privilege of writing history, moulding thought and producing art. So far, so plausible. The

problem comes not with the ideas themselves so much as with their relentlessly dour and pedagogic treatment. We follow the fortunes of a group of forest-dwelling paupers through the centuries, not in a continuous story but rather in a series of didactic historical tableaux.

An itinerant medieval quack salesman sells his trinkets by saying that they dropped from a magic kingdom in the skies. (Message: Vulnerability of the Poor to Exploitative Charlatanism.) A scene of rough peasant copulation in a forest is cross-cut with an etching of a beautiful medieval princess. (Sexual Reality versus Bourgeois Romantic Propaganda.) In case we miss the ironic point of any scene—and the ironic point is basically the same in all of them, viz. that everyday human actions are revealingly different when seen in a primitive rather than a civilised context—there is a saturnine commentator, introduced to us at the beginning of the film as a masked Chorus figure, to tell us what we ought to be thinking at any given moment.

The film not only leaves us in no doubt that we are being preached at, but its sermon, when not over-explaining the easily graspable, is riddled with philosophical corner-cutting. It speaks, for example, of the 'natural rights' of man: a time-honoured expression that, *pace* the disciples of Rousseau, begs more questions than perhaps any philosophical catch phrase in the language. The ghosts of Rousseau and Marx stalk through this primitive forest, not always in easy harmony, and I'm unconvinced that the film offers the spectator any real food for thought other than the not too challengeable assertion that Socialism is better than the Middle Ages.

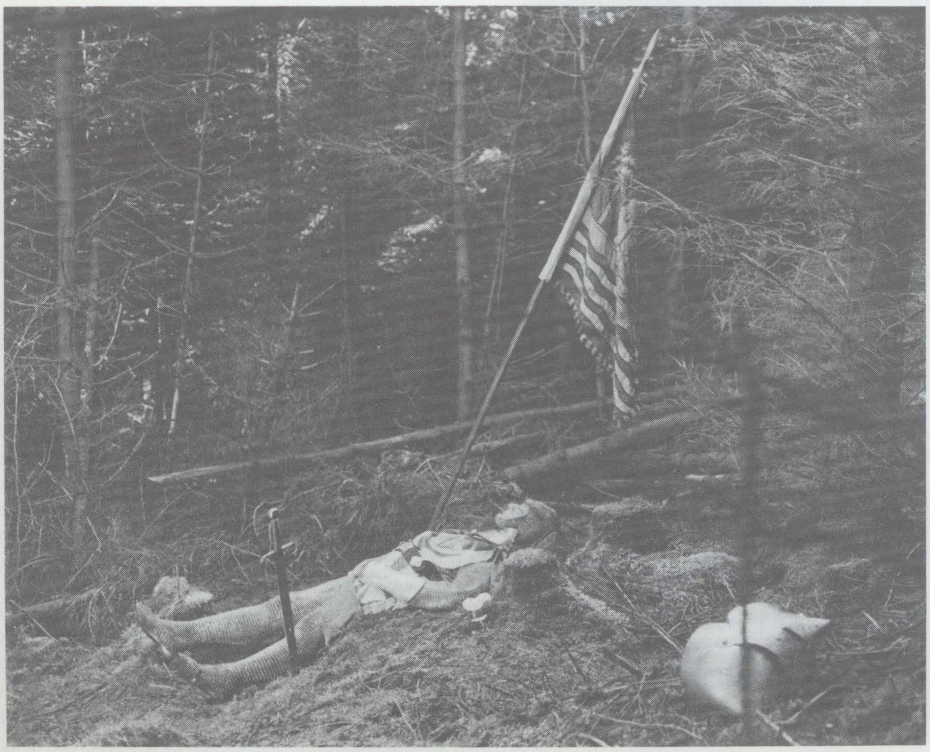
The chief virtue of *In the Forest* is that it places its ideas in an arresting setting and creates its own consistent allegorical world. Edward Bennett's *The Life Story of Baal*, adapted from Brecht, is another matter. The Production Board must have seen more in the submitted script for this movie than I saw in the completed film. 'Though based on an early play by Brecht,' says their annual report, 'the story for this film entails strikingly contemporary observations on the idea of artist as hero and was skilfully adapted for the screen in terms of contemporary notions of narrative form.'

I am curious about these contemporary notions. The film looks to me more like Film School Exercise Number One: Set Yourself a Short Play, or an Extract from a Long Play, To Adapt. Bennett (whose documentary *Hogarth* was shown at the 1977 London Festival) keeps the camera and the cutting mobile, he does some pleasing character groupings, he gets a good performance from Neil Johnston as Baal. But basically this film does not begin to breathe fresh life into Brecht's play. Baal's eloquent anarchism was a war cry against all forms of creative inertia and repression—from sexual prudery to artistic conventionality—and to frame it in so drably orthodox a *mise en scène*, like Film-making by Numbers, is to drain from it all the point and resonance it has.

Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair is a feminist approach to the famous Grimm's fairy tale. Sue Shapiro, Francine Winham and Esther Ronay suggest, plausibly enough, that the fable of the girl shut up by a wicked witch in a tall tower is a parable of female enslavement. The film runs through the Grimm story twice, with attractive animated visuals (by Asa Sjöström), and then rings some modern live-action variations.

Unfortunately, these latter do almost nothing to shed light on the relevance of the Grimm Brothers' tale to modern society. To change the witch's tower into a tower block apartment building, the questing prince into a private detective, the witch into a jealous mother, etc., is transliteration of the feeblest and most unilluminating kind. The film springs to life briefly when it gives a dissertation on witches, and on how in past centuries women endowed with exceptional skills, powers or insights were stigmatised as evil beings and ruthlessly persecuted by a patriarchal society. But the idea, though fascinating and credible, is only aired briefly; and it does not cohere too neatly, alas for the film's logic, with the Grimm story, in which the witch is the imprisoning force and the man the liberator.

'In the Forest'



The three films mentioned above cost between them £74,000 and were the three most expensive projects financed by the Production Board in 1977/78. It seems not a little worrying that three films as lacklustre in execution and as one-hued in political approach should have received the lion's share of the grant from the country's principal funding body for independent cinema.

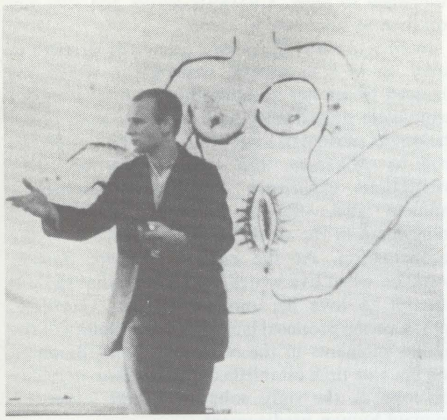
Bill Douglas' *My Way Home* deserves better than to be deployed as a counterweight to these films. But comparisons within a group of movies from the same origin are inevitable. This is not the best of Douglas' films, but there is a passion and personal engagement in it not approached by the other movies, and it is the only one of the four full-length BFI films that seems to transcend the notion of a movie-making 'exercise'.

Douglas comes unstuck only in the last part of the film, when his young hero Jamie, still in the throes of that strange emotional unresponsiveness with which he has progressed through the trilogy, joins the R.A.F. and finds himself stationed in a desert outpost in Egypt. The friend he meets there (Joseph Blatchley) tries to 'draw him out of himself', and intermittently Jamie responds. But the film itself looks lost and comfortless during this sequence, and one suspects that Douglas, whose eye is attuned to the dour expressiveness of Scottish mining villages and black cobbled streets, cannot find the same emblematic richness in a sun-soaked foreign land.

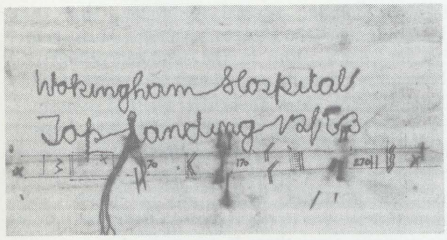
Earlier, the film is movingly in key with its predecessors. The stark contrasts of light and shade, the constant isolation of the central character in mid-frame, the hypersensitive soundtrack, all contribute to the sense of a world in which human contact happens, always, tantalisingly out of the hero's sight and hearing: in another house or another room. There are few pictures of loneliness so evocative and so unsentimental as Bill Douglas' autobiographical trilogy, and as the central character Stephen Archibald has miraculously sustained a difficult role through three films.

The two shorter films newly released by the Board are perhaps the most successful of all; certainly the liveliest and most inventive. Possibly the Board relaxes its mood of high seriousness when judging the merits of shorter, less costly projects. At any rate, both *Animation for Live Action* by Vera Neubauer and *A Walk Through H* by Peter Greenaway are marvellous flights of cinematic fancy.

Neubauer's film also has the sardonic and exact touch that *Rapunzel* kept missing. It combines animation and live action in an inexhaustibly bright and funny collage, playing around feminist themes in its portrait of a modern Everywoman and her perplexed confrontation with the everyday choices and crises of life. Titles erupt upon the screen at frequent intervals—'Once upon a time', 'Then she tried', 'Alternatively'—and between them we see her response to alternative life-styles and courses of action, sketched out with a sort of rapid-fire cartoon extremism: everything from the platitudes of psycho-



'The Life Story of Baal'



'A Walk Through H'

analysis to the harsh realities of abortion, from dreams of being swept off her feet by a muscle-man to housebound despair and thoughts of suicide. The animation is vivid and varied, and delightful chinese-box variations are played (in the style of *Out of the Inkwell*) with the film-within-film possibilities of the Cartoonist at Work. The film is like a juggling act, in which no idea is allowed to rest in the hand longer than is necessary to spring it back into the air.

Compared to *A Walk Through H*, however, even *Animation for Live Action* seems slightly earthbound. Peter Greenaway's 40-minute surrealist film flies free into an empyrean of the imagination all its own. The film begins with the camera tracking through the rooms of an art gallery (past a lone receptionist), while the credits appear. (The film's alternative title is given—*The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist*.) Then the camera slows to a meditative pace as it passes along a wall on which a series of semi-abstract paintings are hung. A voice-off—plummy, matter of fact—starts to impart information. We learn that these 'paintings' are, or were, maps, and that the speaker is, or was, their owner.

'At their simplest,' says the information sheet on the film provided for the 1978 Edinburgh Film Festival, 'the maps are no more than a few hesitant pencil lines on the back of an envelope. At their most complex, they are elaborate, industrious, scaled representations of apparently familiar countries. Some of the maps appear not to be maps at all.' Correction: *all* of the maps appear not to be maps at all. Rather, they are water-colour abstracts linked by a common motif of lines (roads?) travelling through thick patches of colour, and with a scattering of pale, cruciform shapes that look like windmills.

The voice, indefatigably informative, gives us a tiny history of each map as it comes before the camera ('This was an unrealised plan for a park at Staines—the plan was realised, but not at Staines'; 'this map came to me with a letter accusing me of stealing eggs'). And intermittently, the speaker being an ornithologist, shots of birds he has seen on his map-following excursions are intercut with suitable comments. Someone called Tulse Luper is frequently mentioned, a fellow ornithologist and author; and the said Tulse Luper, we understand, collected the maps shortly before the ornithologist-speaker's death so that the latter could make this, his 'last' journey.

There is in the film a clear progression, or perhaps one should say *re*gression. The roads become less clearly marked, the windmill shapes (which, we learn, are insignia of the authenticity of the maps) are discredited. The speaker, as he narrates his imaginary journey, reaches a map of Amsterdam and gets lost in it. He escapes only to venture into maps where the roads are still sketchier and more unclear, and the maps themselves smaller in scale. Finally, he comes to the last map and his journey is completed. He has used 92 maps and travelled 1,418 miles.

The camera draws back again through the art gallery. The lone receptionist departs, switching off the lights and leaving behind her a book she has been reading. The book is Tulse Luper's 'Some Migratory Birds of the Northern Hemisphere'. It contains (so the dust-jacket tells us) 92 maps and 1,418 colour photos of birds.

The film is an island of fantasy lapped on all sides by absurdity. Like all the best surrealist art, it combines the pedantically methodical with the devoutly inconsequential. (Peter Greenaway's previous films have included *Dear Phone,* 'fourteen short anecdotes about the uses and abuses of the telephone', and *Windows,* 'a collection of statistics about defenestration'). All the questions one never dreamed of asking are answered, but none of the questions one is burning to ask. Is there, for example, a real Tulse Luper? One notes, with deepening perplexity, that his name appears among the film's credits as 'ornithological adviser'.

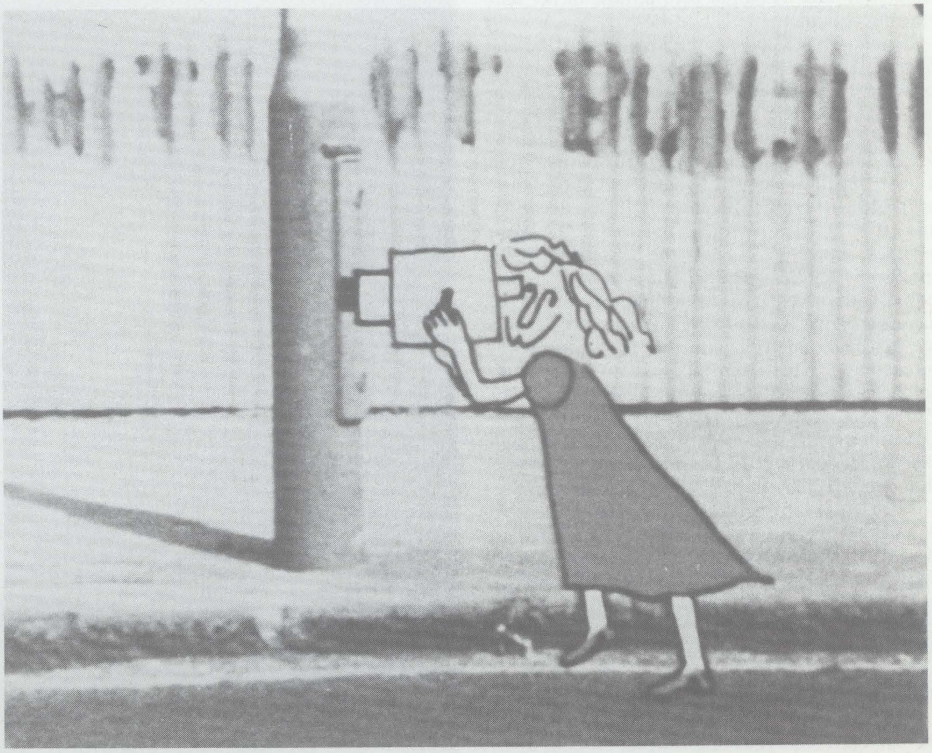
The film takes as its own complete and unquestionable cosmos a world exclusively oriented round maps and birds; and these two *idées fixes* gather, without apparent effort or calculation, so much resonance as to become a metaphor for Life. But the delight of the film is that however much the viewer may try to satisfy himself with interpretations—Are the maps a symbol of the futility of trying to order and pre-plan life's journey? Are the birds a contrasting symbol of uncharted freedom?—the film retains a stubbornly unfathomable fascination. The map/paintings, by Greenaway himself, are honeycombed with witty detail, the narrator's voice is inspirationally solemn and factual (the humour would have been ruined by a 'funny' voice), and the music soundtrack, often no more than a repetitively plinking piano, is perfectly in key with the changing moods of the film.

A Walk Through H is not only an exhilarating film of and for itself, it is also refreshing as a counterbalance to the increasing preponderance of politically programmatic works favoured by the Production Board. In skywriting the merits of Greenaway's film, and in disparaging by comparison didactic works like *In the Forest* and *Rapunzel,* one courts accusations of unseriousness. But originality in art *is* a serious matter; and it is interesting to note that in its comments on Greenaway's work, the Production Board strays for once from its concern with siting projects within recognisable cultural or ideological contexts—the 'contemporary notions' invoked *à propos* of *Baal*—and gives a surprising fanfare to a filmmaker's originality.

Peter Greenaway, their report says, has 'worked outside any of the definable groups of film-makers, developing a complex modernist aesthetic quite unlike any other among British film-makers, using verbalised as well as imagistic language, as well as structures of music.'

One wishes these criteria informed more of the Board's selecting judgments. Contexts and 'contemporary notions' are conveniences for the critic and the historian. They have little or nothing to do with creative vitality in the cinema—what it is, why it happens, and how it may be recognised and encouraged. ■

'Animation for Live Action'



Film Reviews

Autumn Sonata

Ingmar Bergman has returned in *Autumn Sonata* (ITC) to a much quieter mode, but one which is in its own way sometimes as crudely direct as that of his previous film, *The Serpent's Egg*. *Autumn Sonata* is Bergman's second film made in exile: shooting took place in Norway, the production company was based in Munich and finance came from Lew Grade's British conglomerate ITC. The explicit tone of directorial paranoia, which provided *The Serpent's Egg* with such a powerful subtext, is again evident, but in the new film it has to a large extent been both dissipated and brought under control. Bergman has often reconstituted his themes in unexpected new forms, yet the strong impression gained from *Autumn Sonata* is of a twice-told plot and a mode that is itself second hand: as though Bergman had for once simply set himself a task.

It is the tranquil present. We find ourselves in an isolated house, immaculately furnished in the spare, Scandinavian manner, set beside a shimmering expanse of water. Roses bloom outside the house, a Mercedes approaches and a mother and daughter are reunited for the first time in seven years. All is solicitude. The mother, Charlotte, a concert pianist, has been invited to stay following the death of Leonardo, a fellow-musician and her companion of many years. Settled in her bedroom, Charlotte at once launches into a description of her lover's death; the passage is marked by that forthright intimacy that in his recent domestic dramas Bergman has made distinctively his own. The daughter, Eva, a plain, bespectacled woman, a pastor's wife, listens in sympathetic silence. Having lost Leonardo (who was not Eva's father), Charlotte has come to gather her forces. As in the past, her needs—formerly professional, but now emotional—are to be put before those of her self-effacing daughter.

Bergman has said that the idea behind *Autumn Sonata*—the examination of the relationship between a woman and her daughter—had been in his mind for some years. The difference between this relationship and that between a man and his son or daughter, Bergman said, partly derives from a fear on the part of women to show their aggression ('Perhaps because of their education, and this is my personal opinion . . .'). What emerges, however, is not the dissection of a specifically female dilemma, but a loose examination of the consequences for a child (boy or girl) of having a parent (man or woman) who is consumed by personal ambition. In the past, Bergman's protagonists have been allowed to come into conflict with little apparent outside manipulation; Eva and Charlotte, however, are close to being caricatures—one is so meekly unambitious (though she was once a journalist and the author of two short books), the other so vacantly competitive.

The root trouble with *Autumn Sonata* seems to be not that the overall concept is flawed, but that Bergman's approach is so benign. Charlotte comes to Eva and her husband Viktor's house (and the pastor is surely the limpest member of his profession to have featured in a Bergman film—he is not troubled by the silence of God, but rather by a compromised doubtfulness), where she is thunderstruck to learn that her spastic daughter Lena has been removed from the home to which she had been consigned and is being brought up as a surrogate daughter by Eva. Always the professional performer, Charlotte nevertheless rises to the uncomfortable occasion and immediately goes into Lena's room: she is abstractedly concerned, the while shooting anxious glances at Eva for help in understanding Lena's impeded speech.

But, having conjured this ghost, Bergman then fails to compel Charlotte to confront it (she is only once seen with Lena, and for most of the rest of the film the young woman upstairs is effectively ignored). Later, in the course of a tipsy night with Eva, Charlotte is forced to acknowledge (and to a point repent) the extent to which she has ruined her daughter's life. Yet next morning she packs her bags and is last seen on a train with a colleague; further concerts are anticipated and, one presumes, they will—together with Leonardo's considerable fortune—provide the comfort and acclaim which she finds an acceptable substitute for family life.

At the end of the film one does not feel—as one did at the end of, to take two recent comparable examples, *Face to Face* and *Scenes from a Marriage*—that the characters have been substantially affected by their experiences. After the harrowing night in *Autumn Sonata*, Charlotte, who suffers from a bad back, lies on the floor to ease her discomfort, at the same time that Lena, who apparently wishes to establish some sort of bond with her mother, rolls out of bed and manages to pull herself along the landing to the head of the stairs in a vain attempt to attract Charlotte's attention. This climax, with its too easy parallel between two pained people on the floor, fizzles out simply because Bergman chooses to leave matters there. Mother and crippled daughter are not compelled to meet; Charlotte leaves and Eva will continue to take care of Lena.

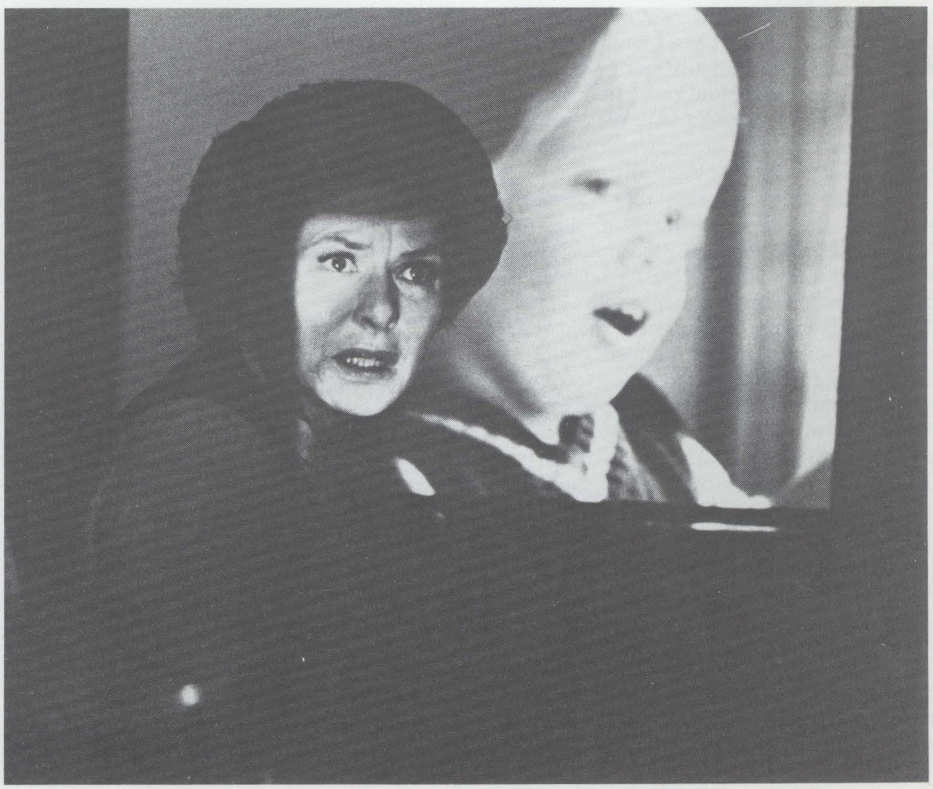
In *Face to Face*, the doctor found the strength to carry on in a wonderful sequence in which she chanced to see her grandmother looking after her near-senile grandfather and suddenly understood the power of human love. And at the end of *Scenes from a Marriage*, the couple after all their tribulations experience a similarly epiphanous moment and, closeted in their 'dark house somewhere in the world', achieve a sort of loving reconciliation. At the end of *Autumn Sonata*, however, when Eva writes to Charlotte that she will attempt to love her mother despite everything, somehow the proposal lacks the inexorability of the similar moments in the other two films. Bergman has not this time established the absolute necessity for love as the only solution to the otherwise doomed human predicament.

This said, there is much to be grateful for in *Autumn Sonata*, several moments that ring absolutely true (the glances between Charlotte and Eva in Lena's room in the sequence alluded to above). Liv Ullmann as Eva and Ingrid Bergman as Charlotte (the latter all brittle, permed assurance, and more convincing speaking her native Swedish than she is in her badly self-dubbed expostulations in English to a colleague over the telephone) both give performances which are in many ways admirable in view of the tight rein the director (and one assumes since there is no credit that he is also the scriptwriter) has kept on their roles.

In the film's most sustained sequence Charlotte in defiantly red widow's weeds prevails upon Eva to play a Chopin 'Prelude'. The scene, like an earlier one in which Viktor complacently folds the dinner-table napkins, is full of beautifully observed behavioural details. Eva plays hesitantly but Charlotte, who is visibly moved, cannot resist following up a compliment with a lecture on Chopin (she is intimately acquainted with the composer's temperament while ignorant of her daughter's) and a detailed criticism of Eva's interpretation. Eva responds by asking Charlotte to play the piece; Charlotte demurs, but of course finally agrees. At this point Ingrid Bergman gives a superb display of a woman suddenly transforming herself into a concert pianist, straightening her necklace and preparing—though only before her daughter and son-in-law—to put her reputation on the line.

JOHN PYM

Ingrid Bergman in 'Autumn Sonata'



A Wedding

Up to a point, at least, Robert Altman's celebration of the celebration of matrimony in *A Wedding* (Fox) is irresistibly and uncomplicatedly funny. Eavesdropping at precisely the right moment, his camera is invariably well placed to pull a plum out of the surrounding chaos of socially amplified intrigues, obsessions, eccentricities, gaffes, resentments and pretensions. Obviously doomed from the outset by a doddery old bishop who very nearly fails to unite the happy couple at all by forgetting the relevant lines; barely surviving the inconsiderately untimely demise of grandma (Lillian Gish), who lies a closely guarded secret on her death-bed upstairs; eliciting several rattling skeletons from the stately closets of the socially registered family who are busily marrying into *nouveau riche* money; and reaching a nadir of screeching recrimination when bride and groom are believed (erroneously) to have been killed shortly after taking off in their honeymoon car—the wedding gradually becomes a looking-glass into which one peers, fascinated, at a minor key counterpart to the nine circles of Dante's inferno.

With Altman's actors as usual given their carefully controlled heads, his little set pieces are singularly easy to take. For instance, the illicit encounter in the kitchen garden between the mother of the bride (Carol Burnett) and the corpulently jovial uncle of the groom (Pat McCormick) who has pleaded sudden passion with such eloquence that she bemusedly yields. Rushing ecstatically into each other's arms, under the curious gaze of a bevy of pageboys and flower-girls, they merely contrive to judge angle and distance insufficiently well to fulfil E. M. Forster's maxim of 'Only connect . . .' Or again, even more sit. com. in effect—but none the less engaging for that—the lemming-like rush for too few lavatories after the lengthy ceremony, which leaves the tottering bishop (John Cromwell), kindly guided to the brink of bliss in an anteroom, despairingly contemplating the infinity of mirrors behind one of which is the desired door.

Paradoxically, however, one also gradually becomes aware of the extent to which Altman is making his audience work for their easy laughs by leaving characters unintroduced, relationships unstated, undercurrents unstressed. At the very end of the film, for example, after all the horrors have been tidily tucked away under the carpet and a semblance of harmony restored, the professional wedding organiser (Geraldine Chaplin) and one of the bridesmaids (Lesley Rogers) sit gratefully on the front steps of the house to relax for a moment in the approaching darkness. Weddings, sighs Geraldine Chaplin, are so lovely, so sad when they end. 'Yeah,' murmurs Lesley Rogers, 'when it's over it gets real sad.' Given the travesty of loveliness we have just witnessed, the irony is obvious (all the more so in that the Chaplin character has been revealed as a lesbian). But the scene only acquires its full reverberation if one has also picked up en route the casual intimation that the gentleman glimpsed furtively screwing in the bushes earlier on was Lesley Rogers' husband, so that one begins to wonder whether her 'when it's over' referred not only to a wedding but to a marriage.

At the same time one realises, as the film progresses, that the 'naturalism' (comically heightened, of course) is gradually being abandoned for—in the phrase annexed by Jonathan Rosenbaum in defence of *Nashville*—a 'dialectic collage of unreality'. No one wedding could credibly throw out quite so many sins and situations as this one does. Yet Altman keeps on turning the screw, ever more outrageously, until the bones and ligaments of reality snap and, as in *Nashville*, one finds oneself confronted by an almost abstract microcosm which can be interpreted any way one wants.

Quite apart from its obvious symbolic connotations (religious, social, dynastic, hierarchic, authoritarian), a wedding would seem peculiarly apt to Altman's purpose since it is above all a solemn occasion upon which people are careful to be on their best behaviour in defence of all their little deceits and lapses, and also a joyous celebration in which tongues and manners are likely to be loosened enough to let the guard drop. Radiating outwards from the fact of the old grandmother lying upstairs in unacknowledged death as the wedding reception proceeds, a whole system of such defences is revealed. Two salient facts in particular emerge. One is that the materfamilias has fondly indulged one of her daughters (Virginia Vestoff) in an affair with a black manservant (Cedric Scott), always provided it is conducted exclusively within her four walls. The other is that she has equally complaisantly ensured the perpetuation of her dynasty. Her daughter, the mother of the groom (Nina Van Pallandt) has married an Italian (Vittorio Gassman) generally and indulgently supposed to have some romantic relation to the Mafia, but in fact a humble waiter solemnly sworn by grandma never to reveal his shameful origins.

'A Wedding': the caterer (Viveca Lindfors) and the groom's mother (Nina Van Pallandt)

As in *Nashville*, the socio-political caps left lying around fit very comfortably indeed, with even the wedding guests who fail to show up suggesting the bankruptcy of America's policy of goodwill. The trouble is that, whereas the characters in *Nashville* obstinately maintained lives and wills of their own, often running counter to the allegory and destroying its linear simplicity, here they exist only within, and in terms of, the wedding. *A Wedding*, in other words, is much more simplistic: good fun, but not, like *Nashville*, a kaleidoscopic reappraisal of the American dream.

TOM MILNE

Blood Relatives

Blood Relatives (Rank) is one of Claude Chabrol's most dissatisfying, ill-staged and ineffective melodramas. It takes place in a milieu (present-day Montreal) that seems to allow none of the scene-setting fluency of his native French thrillers, and in the context of a bi-lingual co-production that has resulted in a flat, UNESCO mélange of acting styles and even more disastrous dubbing (particularly in the case of Stéphane Audran's already eccentric, uncharacteristic role). Worst of all, it is a thriller that patently fails to thrill: not much effort is made to sustain the mystery of who knifed teenager Muriel Stark (Lisa Langlois) to death, and the detective process, for all that it features the popular hero of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novels (Donald Sutherland here; Robert Lansing in a long-running American TV series based on the character of Steve Carella), is a strangely oblique, even passive one, and mainly involves Carella's putting the pieces together by reading the murdered girl's diary.

The diary, in fact, has led one or two reviewers to compare *Blood Relatives* with *Que la Bête meure*, whose hero also recorded his thoughts as he hunted down his son's hit-and-run killer, and whose diary served as a craftily unpredictable alibi once retribution was achieved. The comparison is seductive, in that it transfers the tightly binding irony and murderous logic of the earlier film to the later one. What is most intriguing about *Blood Relatives*, however, is exactly the way in which it seems to be out of control, its social satire too directionless and its mystery framework too shapeless for the expected points to be made. By comparison with *Que la Bête meure*, it lacks a single, controlling presence through whose motives and actions such elements can be channelled. Instead, it opens itself up to a variety of presences and viewpoints in a way which recalls the 'messiness' of *Innocents with Dirty Hands*, the film in which Chabrol turned his most daring, genre-defying cartwheels, having decided that the mystery was not a riddle to be answered but an act of prestidigitation and surprise.

There seems, in fact, to be a distinct pattern to those films, beginning with *Ten Days' Wonder* (or perhaps as early as *Le Scandale*), in which Chabrol has quite sensibly decided that the mixture of influences and nationalities in the production makes it impossible to pretend that all the details can be put together in as seamlessly self-sufficient a manner as in *Le Boucher*, for instance, and that the best solution is to acknowledge the ruptures in surface texture and tone by playing very self-consciously with the elements of plot and theme. That he can still move confidently between these bouts of jocular gamesmanship and his more easily appreciated melodramas of bourgeois life is confirmed by *Violette Nozière*, the film he has made since *Blood Relatives* and which, by all accounts, is a more consistently textured study of the famous father-poisoner who became a *cause célèbre* in France in the 1930s. Confusion only arises when critics are presented with *Blood Relatives* and are shocked to find that it is not at all like *Le Boucher*, *Juste avant la Nuit* or, for that matter, *Que la Bête meure*.

Not that the God-games that distinguish *Ten*

'Blood Relatives': Donald Sutherland, Aude Landry

Days' Wonder or *Innocents with Dirty Hands* are exactly what Chabrol is after in *Blood Relatives*. Despite the disruptiveness of his polyglot production, he has been fairly respectful with his source novel, and even slides in his own distinctive imagery in a peculiarly clipped way. Most noticeably, the bucolic setting that provides such an ironically close-fitting idyll in *Le Boucher*, and more expansively ironic overtones of Paradise Lost in *Les Noces Rouges*, here becomes a schematic country/city opposition, as Carella drives out to a farm to question Muriel's cousin, Patricia Lowery (Aude Landry), the professed witness to the murder who eventually names her own brother as the culprit. At the end, as Carella's interrogation causes the real murderer's defences to collapse with a shattering scream, a quick flurry of shots of the countryside marks Innocence Lost in a kind of staccato shorthand. If it seems to be spoiling the game to intimate whodunit, one should note that Chabrol, for all his unaccustomed discretion, is scarcely playing the game either. The solution is quite predictable, and evidently meant to be so, since the detective is moving throughout not on a linear track after clues, but in circles round the dominant motif that is both cause and context of the crime: the family.

Initially, the film seems to promise a juicy murder investigation: the camera tracks along a rubbish-strewn street ('Other bad news,' comments the inevitable newscaster, after his bulletin on the murder, 'The garbage collectors have been on strike'), as Muriel and Patricia make their way home from a party, ducking under an archway during a cloudburst as the camera lifts to study the rain collecting in a tarpaulin overhead. Muriel's death screams then send it tracking quickly back along the street as Patricia rushes into a police station, leaving bloody palm-prints on the glass door. The first 'wrong' note, however, is struck soon after when Carella arrives on the case, and is immediately most concerned about his coffee and the lack of sugar. A common enough detail, perhaps, in the currently 'callous' style of crime thrillers—but it is one which develops into what can only be taken as a convoluted private joke, as Carella's coffee-habit is stressed as much as the characters' recourse to whisky in the French melodramas. Their representative here, of course, is Stéphane Audran, as the distracted Mrs. Lowery, playing a character at last showing the effects of the constant imbibing.

More pertinently, Carella's investigation keeps returning him to the same point, or rather to the same delicate emotional terrain where he is as much at risk as anyone. An early scene indicates the emotional undercurrents, as well as hinting at the solution to the crime: while Carella is walking in a park with his teenage daughter, she links arms with him and confides, 'We're like lovers'. From Mr. Lowery, who explains how he took Muriel into his home after the death of her parents ('The family's a sacred thing'), but whose attachment to his niece was more than avuncular, Carella picks up the clearest clue to the unmentionable side of the family relationships, confirmed when he reads in Muriel's diary of how she and her cousin, Patricia's brother Andrew (Laurent Malet), became lovers. The film is a catalogue of such disorder, eventually casting doubt on every expression of emotional attachment or complicity—the fatherly role which Carella takes in his questioning of Patricia, even the otherwise neutrally presented scenes in his own home—until the unease crystallises in the revelation of Patricia's jealousy of her brother ('He loved me more than he loved her. He's got to love his sister more than his cousin').

But if thematically the film is less concerned with solving a crime than exploring relationships, formally it is even less conventional in refusing to allow the mechanics of the investigation to determine its structure. The unsatisfactoriness of the film at this level, its failure to establish the detective as the controlling figure, an interrogator on the audience's behalf, is because Carella is being made our representative in a much more insidious way. As Carella's enquiries lead him to a realisation of his own vulnerability (the detective as a possible factor in the crime interestingly parallels Sutherland's part in *Klute*), his role becomes steadily more passive. He is reduced first to a note-taking function and then, as he settles into reading Muriel's diary so that the family relationships can be laid out in flashback, to a simple narrative device. The voyeurism that is made increasingly explicit in his role is then turned by the film into its own frame of reference. Most significantly, in one of the arguments (developing into sexual assault) between Andrew and Muriel, the dialogue and action suddenly begin to duplicate (or anticipate) the version of Muriel's murder which Patricia will tell the police. Before we are made aware of Patricia's presence as an observer at this point, Chabrol cuts to a shot of the angry scene framed through the bedroom window—a trope which effectively pulls together the perspectives of murderess, detective and audience.

RICHARD COMBS

Dog Soldiers

The producer Herb Jaffe agreed to buy a portion of the movie rights to Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldiers* on the strength of an enthusiastic newspaper review. United Artists were interested in the project and against Jaffe's judgment hired Karel Reisz as director. Robert Stone worked with Reisz for a year on two versions of the script; these were subsequently abandoned since Stone was unwilling to sacrifice any element of his novel and Reisz was unwilling to make a four-hour movie. Jaffe then brought in screenwriter Charles Eastman for a radical rewrite; Reisz did not approve the result and hired Stone's friend Judith Rascoe with whom he himself worked on a shortened, but more literally faithful adaptation.* After all the tinkering, *Dog Soldiers* (*Who'll Stop the Rain*, Reisz's favoured alternative, and the title under which the film was shown at Cannes, being deemed too allusive for an action picture) in fact bears little relation to the specifically literary qualities of the original novel. These, despite some blood-curdling descriptions of violent human behaviour, derive primarily from long passages detailing the ruminations of the protagonist, Ray Hicks.

Dog Soldiers opens with a burst of violence: a war correspondent, John Converse (Michael Moriarty), finds himself under fire somewhere in Vietnam; there is a mighty explosion, bodies fly. Converse picks himself out of the mud with a look of blank amazement; we are given to assume that this is the moment he loses his self-possession. The year (in the novel at least) is 1971. President Nixon's policy of 'Vietnamisation' is under way; the Americans have perceived the war to be unwinnable; and—as Nicholas Tomalin reported from Khe Sanh—the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were now primarily concerned with attacking their fellow countrymen. 'In a world where elephants are pursued by flying men,' Converse remarks in voice-over, referring to a comically insane American military strategy, 'people naturally want to get high.' The exact reasons for Converse's decision to ship a large consignment of heroin to California through an intermediary, Hicks (Nick Nolte), are never made entirely clear: it is, however, a supremely negative act of rebellion by an individual driven out of his wits by his *passive* involvement in a morally unacceptable war.

Hicks carelessly throws the packet of heroin over the perimeter fence of the Oakland naval base. His troubles begin, however, when he attempts to extract his fee from Converse's wife Marge (Tuesday Weld), a barbiturate addict but an otherwise ostensibly rational woman who is employed in her father's left-wing bookstore. She knows nothing about the heroin; but, before she has time to react rationally, her house is savagely attacked by two thugs in the pay of a corrupt federal narcotics' agent, Antheil (Anthony Zerbe), who are themselves then beaten up by Hicks. Marge and Hicks set off into the wilderness, pursued by Antheil and the thugs, who have captured Converse and ultimately attempt to use him as a ransom for the heroin; the film climaxes with a supposedly purifying burst of violence in which Hicks, buoyed up by a romanticised notion of his 'buddy' relationship with Converse and the 'class' of the now heroin-addicted Marge, sacrifices himself to allow Marge and Converse to escape to a new, chastened life.

Dog Soldiers starts with considerable promise. Photographer Robert H. Kline used stock requiring very little light and the first section of the film (until the beginning of Marge and Hicks' flight) is bathed in an infernal copper glow; sometimes indeed, as in the scene of Hicks' visit to an Oakland bar, the characters' flesh tones are all that distinguish them from the enveloping gloom. This colour quality seems particularly appropriate for the scenes at the huge Oakland base and in the Saigon docks, both of which have the look of military installations where too much hardware appears to have been waiting too long (and in the

* For further production details see Stephen Zito's article in *American Film*, September 1977.

case of the former where security seems virtually non-existent). On another level, with a slight variation, the lighting is made to bathe the interior of the well-appointed house in Saigon from which Converse collects the consignment of drugs with a burnished warmth, signalling its significance to the correspondent as a refuge from the exterior horrors. In addition to this, Reisz introduces the character of his anti-hero, Hicks, with considerable panache. He is first seen covered with mud during an almost surreal game of American football; he seems at this point the typical, dispossessed serviceman trying to revive memories of home by an enactment of a national pastime. On the ship home, however, expectations are reversed in a strangely unreal sequence as he silently limbers up on deck, practising the martial arts that are later to prove his temporary salvation.

It is when Marge and Hicks go on the run that the film as a whole begins to lose direction. The lowering colours give way to bright natural lighting (to underline the new-found freedom of the fugitives) and what promised to develop into a convoluted examination of the psychological effects of Vietnam on the American conscience skates away into the realms of an old-fashioned chase movie. By setting the film's climax on a small mountain, a colony of sorts, still decked out with the relics of its former hippy occupants, and by having some of these totems destroyed in the final gunfight, Reisz seems to be edging towards a moral about the failure of the flabby, non-violent utopianism of the 60s to stand up to the mindless brutality which has spread to 70s America in the aftermath of Vietnam. The validity of this rather tendentious moral, however, is brought into question by his confused treatment of the three main characters. Each is initially presented as the personification of a different aspect of negative despair; but in order to resolve the hackneyed plot, Reisz is finally compelled, quite arbitrarily, to nudge the audience towards a vague emotional identification with 'trapped' Hicks and Marge and the 'hostage' Converse.

Reisz, it seems to me, encourages us to go even further. At the end of the film, Hicks 'nobly' sacrifices himself, having perceived he has nowhere else to go and that a return to the sanctuary of the hippy past no longer offers safety. As a result of this act (pathetically undercut though it is by Hicks' last walk along a railway track vainly trying to keep his spirits up by singing Marine Corps songs), Marge and Converse are enabled to drive towards the horizon, the representatives, it seems, of some new, partly purified force: they have both gone through the fire—and Converse has found the strength to pour away the heroin on the sandy ground beside Hicks' grave—and they now appear to have some hope of pulling themselves together (the opposition having, after all, been neatly eliminated). They are, if nothing else, rather bleak warning signals to the rest of us.

JOHN PYM

Turtle on Its Back

At the beginning of Luc Béraud's *La Tortue sur le Dos* (Connoisseur), two writers suffering from mental blocks are being interviewed by a solemn American journalist called Mr. Prokosch who doesn't speak French too well and therefore works through an interpreter. One of them is Paul (Jean-François Stévenin), who eventually decides in desperation to settle for hack-work ghosting the memoirs of an octogenarian general, and is duly slapped by his contemptuous wife Camille (Bernadette Lafont). No prizes for spotting that Béraud's starting point lies in Godard and Moravia.

But where *Le Mépris* (and for that matter, *Pierrot le Fou*) took the romantic view of the artist, indulging the notion of death as the appropriate expiation for a failure in inspiration, Béraud determinedly sidesteps all such grand gestures. Instead he shows his writer to be very much an ordinary mortal, a sad-eyed turtle unkindly flipped over on to his back by his muse and struggling to right himself, while in the meantime trying to cope with the dismal daily round of doing the shopping for a wife who goes out to work and marshalling the sexual energies that seem to evaporate under what he takes to be her beady eye.

Few films have viewed the difficult process of creation quite so sympathetically or so perceptively. Plump, bald and more than slightly comical in his earthbound attempts to give expression to wild pretensions, Paul Neveux is nobody's idea of an artist. We are even left in some doubt as to whether he really has any talent at all (his first book created 'a certain stir' six years ago, since when he has published nothing); but the point Béraud is trying to get over, the *raison d'être* of his process of demystification, is that the pangs and torments of frustrated creativity are not the sole prerogative of genius.

The first half of the film is therefore intensely and idiosyncratically funny as Paul lays his impotence squarely on the line in a series of brief, elliptical tableaux which invariably fade out on a note of suspended inconsequence. Sitting determinedly down at his desk, usually only to delete another line or two from his tangled mass of manuscript, or to write anguished confessions of sterility (left lying around in predetermined positions so that he will know whether Camille has obliged by reading them), he is willingly distracted by an accident in the street, a chair that collapses, an errand that can be done. Sneaking off to cafés and cinemas, he restlessly seeks further distraction in pursuit of pretty girls. And when he does manage to get as far as bed with a teenager who blithely harps on their difference in age, we see only the mournfully disillusioning end of the affair which sends him right back to contemplate his inadequacies again.

Punctuated by the cheerful recurring image of Camille returning home each evening clutching the paper and a loaf of bread (her hands begrimed from her work as a furniture-varnisher, but otherwise impeccably chic and in no way suggesting the traditional put-upon wife), these tableaux form a sort of montage in which Béraud uses his fades as a double-edged weapon. On the one hand they furnish the comedy in lieu of gags (Paul sits dreamily masturbating behind his desk: fade: the collapsing chair has subjected him to a humiliating pratfall). On the other, they lend an almost tangible sense of duration to Paul's crisis, simultaneously suggesting not only the passage of real time in which the gradual deterioration of his relationship with Camille becomes absolutely credible, but also a temporal stasis in which Paul's obsessive need to go on writing, even if only to express the fact that he can think of nothing to express, lands him on a merry-go-round that keeps turning in a vicious circle. Exhausted emotionally and intellectually, he becomes like a man on the brink of sleep, brooding on impossible problems which, as the dream world approaches, suddenly become entirely possible.

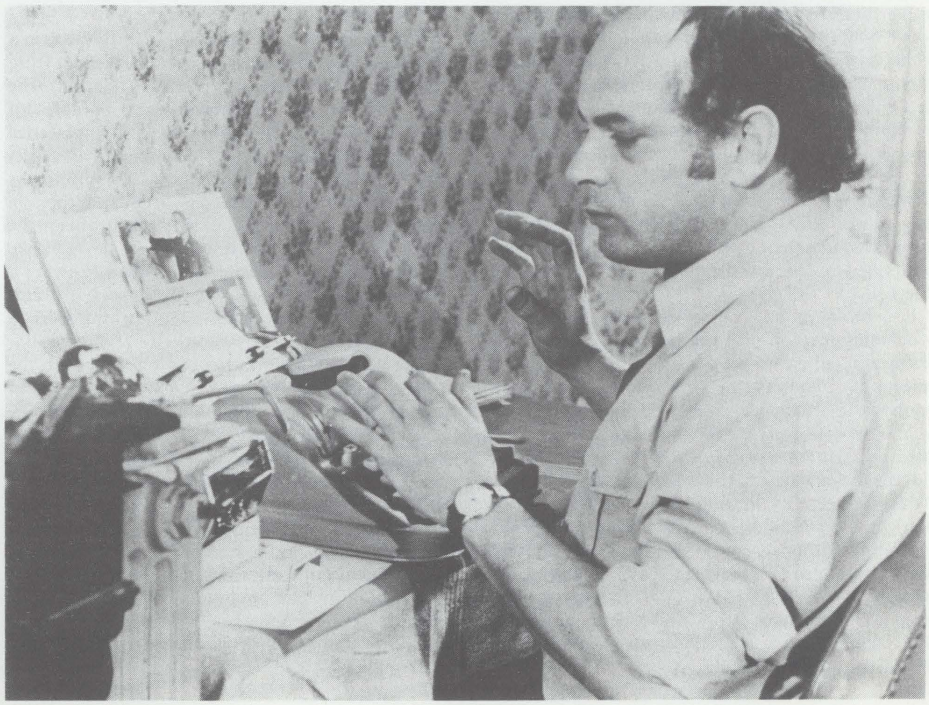
At which point, as the exasperated Camille finally throws him out on his ear, the film abruptly changes tone to chart a sort of 'season in hell'. Wandering a nocturnal Paris in which he is robbed by thugs, beaten up by police, translated to a terrifying hospital and finally reduced to sharing his squalid hotel room with a sinister negro, Paul is miraculously rescued by a loan from his similarly blocked friend (Claude Miller), and emerges a sadder and wiser man, with a completed manuscript, to set off in quest of reconciliation with Camille.

This sequence opens with a shot of Paul walking past a cinema advertising a spectacular double-bill, followed by a marvellously airy crane shot looking down over the whole of the Place de la Bastille. Béraud could hardly have made it plainer that the point here is not that reality intrudes on Paul's private despairs, but rather that, because unreality is given free rein in his mind, he finally realises the extent to which he has been living, intellectually and emotionally, in fantasy. Life and literature interact in the people and events here. The negro whose snuff-taking is metamorphosed into cocaine-sniffing, for instance, is Queequeg, conjured by the poster for *Moby Dick*; but he is also Camille, usurping her vacated place in Paul's bed (an identification confirmed by a series of three shots: in the first and last, Paul is lying face up in bed with the negro beside him; in the third, he is face down with his hand forlornly discovering the empty place where Camille ought to be).

With astonishingly subtle intricacy, Béraud uses these 'fantasy' sequences not only to give voice to Paul's guilts and defences but to suggest a kind of reconciliation with himself. Apparently returning to 'reality', the two final sequences show Paul proudly displaying his now completed manuscript (but with gestures implying that it is merely a sheaf of blank paper), taking a train to rejoin Camille, and finally confronting her in mutual delight across a rain-swept street as the sun breaks through (the image being frozen before they can come together).

The thought here is, I think, presented as the deed. Paul, in other words, has recognised the falsity of both his literary ambitions and his relationship to Camille, and decided to settle for

'Turtle on Its Back': Jean-François Stévenin



the truth he can now grasp. Very ambitious as well as very assured for a first film, *La Tortue sur le Dos* in fact resolves itself into a spiritual pilgrimage illuminated by Béraud's diffident admission that he was thinking, in all due proportion, of *Pickpocket* and that quintessential Bressonian line: 'O Jeanne, pour arriver jusqu'à toi, quel drôle de chemin il m'a fallu prendre.'

TOM MILNE

Blue Collar

If one thing unites the films which various directors (Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma) have made from Paul Schrader's scripts, it is their sure instinct for a metaphoric jugular, for a binding image which somehow makes explicable the scattershot confusion of plot and theme. Whatever else may be open to question in Schrader's high-octane approach, the impetus of each project, its basis in a powerful conception of moral and emotional impasse, demanding violent resolution, is never in doubt. The surprise, then, of *Blue Collar* (CIC), Schrader's first film as director, is not that it lacks the visual fireworks of Scorsese or De Palma but that it never crystallises in one central idea or image, developing along more deliberate, discursive, schematic lines. And this despite the fact that Schrader's own statement of intent—'I wanted to write a movie about some guys who rip off their union, because it seemed to me such a wonderfully self-hating kind of act'—seems to conjure up just such a volatile emotional dynamic, including an obscure, self-punishing religious streak familiar from his work for others.

The key to the unexpected development of *Blue Collar* might be found in the elaboration of this statement: 'I didn't set out to make a left-wing film. I had no visions of making this into a concrete political thing ... While I was working on the script, I realised that it had come to a very specific Marxist conclusion.' It would be over-simplifying to say that the thriller element—the three disgruntled auto workers who break into their union's safe discover that they have stumbled on to something much bigger—and the late-developing political message do not quite jell. More drastically, they seem to have required Schrader to divide his attentions, developing one at the expense of the other as he finds that they create quite different demands within the structure of plot and characters. Schrader's direction, plain and workmanlike, proves unequal to the task of imposing a stylistic unity once the film in other ways has begun to splinter. The sequences on the factory floor, establishing the industrial grievances, are diluted rather than strengthened by the domestic scenes, in which Schrader tries to elaborate on the economics while maintaining the tone of a Norman Lear sit-com. Similarly, the initial presentation of the union as a villain of straw (that can't fulfil its obligations by maintaining lockers and soft-drink machines), and thus as a fit target for the three heroes' comic larceny plot, hardly blends with the later attempt to elevate union corruption as a serious issue, or with the conspirators' dilemma about whether, in turning against their own, they have played into the hands of scarcely more respectworthy institutions (the F.B.I.).

Up to a point, Schrader finds a central, controlling metaphor in the factory itself, and the picture of industrial relations in an assembly-line automobile plant. The major issue here is race, as a symbol for all the divisions and antagonisms by which the company keeps its employees in line: 'lifers against the new boys, the young against the old, the niggers against the whites—everything they do is to keep us in our place' as one of the characters explains, in a phrase which is repeated as a solemn anthem behind the final freeze-frame confrontation of two workers. Thus the friendship between two blacks, Zeke (Richard Pryor) and Smokey (Yaphet Kotto), and the white Jerry Bartowski (Harvey Keitel) serves as a potential challenge, as they decide to better their lot by striking at the System (in which the union has become indistinguishable from management), and then as a symbol of individual hopelessness as the System pushes back and their friendship fragments.

'Blue Collar': Yaphet Kotto, Richard Pryor, Harvey Keitel

What they find in the safe, along with a paltry six hundred dollars, which quickly expands in the union's insurance claim to ten and then twenty thousand dollars, is a notebook listing illegal loans made to 'interests' in Las Vegas. Although Jerry and Zeke are sufficiently idealistic and outraged to want to expose the dishonesty, the more detached, potentially 'criminal' Smokey counsels 'You're trying to hurt someone else instead of helping yourself', and suggests that they use the notebook for blackmail. Having established the three as a very unstable unit, in terms of bar-room camaraderie, Schrader then carefully charts the ways they are split apart. As the most knowing and independent, Smokey is simply destroyed; conscientious family man Jerry (sweating out his encroaching paranoia in an isolated, *noir*-ish sequence) is finally intimidated into the arms of the F.B.I.; and Zeke accepts an offer to take over the job of union representative. When Jerry accuses him of having been bought out, Zeke confidently replies that 'what they bought was a stick of dynamite' and unassailably argues that as a black he is unlikely to have another such opportunity: 'You're my friend, but you're thinking white.'

Political antagonisms in *Blue Collar* develop in a logically tough-minded fashion, fairly distinct from other Hollywood forays into labour relations (the recent *F.I.S.T.*, for example) where parables of power and corruption result only in complacency and pessimism about change. What finally detracts from its impact is the way it painstakingly draws attention to social realities, only to diffuse them in uncertain or misplaced emphases: most obviously, all the sequences in the respective homes of Zeke and Jerry are single-mindedly designed to make a point about their financial hardship, but in terms that range from the glibly sentimental (Jerry's daughter lacerating her mouth by trying to improvise the braces her father cannot afford) to the no less glibly comic. The middle-of-the-night cocaine party most successfully establishes the friendship between the three men, allowing them to expatiate on the economic problems that are a large part of their bond, ending with a long-held shot in which the three reminisce out of their own experience about the evils of capitalism, consumerism and built-in obsolescence. But the discussion, and the party, constitute a noticeable sore thumb: a *scène-à-faire* which Schrader needs to draw dramatic threads together but which otherwise cuts across the grain of his reconstruction of blue collar realities.

RICHARD COMBS

Interiors

The increasing directorial ambition evinced by *Sleeper* and *Love and Death* probably made it only to be expected that Woody Allen would seek to direct a movie not centred on himself as performer, and the elements of psychodrama in *Annie Hall* similarly made predictable a venture outside the realms of comedy. The evidence of *Interiors* (United Artists), however, may call into question his wisdom in attempting both aims at once.

As the title implies, *Interiors* is chamber drama: Allen's admiration for Ingmar Bergman is well known and clearly it is the dominant mode in Bergman's work since *Through a Glass Darkly* that has provided his formal model, even to the extent of the coastal setting of his film's principal action, though one should stress that there is no question of vulgar plagiarism, visually or otherwise. The atmosphere, indeed, is notably different; what strikes one particularly about the film is the modesty of its emotional register, the quietness of its desperation, if desperation is not itself too strong a term. The film's essentially theatrical construction—it is worth recalling that Allen has, like Bergman, worked extensively in the theatre—heightens the suspicion that the condition to which *Interiors* aspires is that of Long Island Chekhov, and that the three sisters at the heart of the picture represent a Chekhovian legacy as much as did the trio in *Cries and Whispers*. But where Bergman is able to use this as a starting point for his own inimitable concerns, it is by no means certain where Allen is headed (though it is clearly not in the direction of laughter).

The sisters of Allen's movie are the grown-up daughters of Arthur (E. G. Marshall), a wealthy lawyer, whose decision in late middle-age to separate from his ambitious but independently successful wife Eve (Geraldine Page) leads her to a nervous breakdown and a suicide attempt and obliges the daughters to come to terms not only with their parents but with their own lives. Arthur's ultimate decision to opt for divorce and remarriage to Pearl (Maureen Stapleton), a divorcée as manifestly Eve's social and intellectual inferior as she is more outgoing and affectionate, bitterly antagonises his supposedly favourite daughter Joey (Marybeth Hurt—a striking debut) and finally precipitates Eve's further attempt, this time successful, to take her own life.

The emphasis in the unfolding of the narrative (partly told in somewhat confusingly handled flashbacks) is less upon the feelings of the older figures than upon the effect on the daughters: Joey herself, who dabbles in photography and writing and lives with Mike (Sam Waterston), seemingly a political scientist; her elder sister Renata (Diane

'Interiors': Diane Keaton, Kristin Griffith, Marybeth Hurt

Keaton), admired poet married to a failed novelist (Richard Jordan); and younger sister Flyn (Kristin Griffith), a minor Hollywood actress, though she in fact remains largely absent until the later stages of the film.

Dramatically and thematically, it is with our response to Renata and Joey that the essential stumbling block to the movie presents itself. Involvement with them is crucially hindered by the fact that the family background is not elaborated in enough detail to let us judge for ourselves the validity of, for instance, Renata's claim that Joey feels guilty for rejecting her mother, or Joey's that Renata is wary of her (Joey) as a competitive threat. And more damagingly still, Allen's delineation of these literary-artistic lives sometimes verges uncomfortably close to unwitting parody. When Renata constantly seeks to convince her husband of his talent as a novelist, or declares that she is preoccupied with death but 'the intimacy of it embarrasses me', or when Joey voices 'a need to express myself, but I don't know what I want to express', we seem to be only a small step away from the memorably pompous culture-vulture of the cinema foyer scene in *Annie Hall*.

We may deduce that what links these characters is a preoccupation with a way of living rather than with living itself. 'There was always a kind of harmony,' says the father, looking back, 'but it was like an ice palace.' (Appropriately, Eve's profession is interior decoration.) Similarly, Joey fears that a job she has been offered would cause her to be 'swallowed up in some anonymous lifestyle'. But the implications are never worked through, and it seems significant that one has to turn to the movie's dialogue to evidence such concerns. It is true, however, that the visual style reinforces such an interpretation through a colour scheme which constantly harmonises the beige and grey apparel of all the characters except Pearl with their meticulously tasteful surroundings, whilst Pearl, the *femme moyenne sensuelle*, is dressed in vivid primary colours. Yet the very obtrusiveness of this device highlights the stylistic uncertainty, and the sense of strain incurred by combining a formalised selectivity in the narrative with enough naturalism to make one wonder why, say, Pearl's sons have not put in an appearance at her wedding.

The movie's two most successful passages, in fact, proceed from a naturalistic basis. The first is Arthur's breakfast table announcement of his decision to leave Eve, a conventional domestic tableau brought touchingly alive by subdued precision of observation. The second is the subtly complementary scene of the family dinner party at which Arthur introduces Pearl to his daughters. Here one finds a free-wheeling sense of social comedy—Pearl enlarges upon her claim that one of her sons runs an art gallery by explaining that it is located in 'the lobby of Cesar's Palace at Vegas'—which, besides reminding one briefly of the Allen of old, breathes into the film a sense of spontaneous feeling.

But if Allen has already appeared to stack the deck by making Eve something of a traditional Hollywood *monstre sacrée*, providing Geraldine Page with flowing clothes and skull-cap hair-do, he is guilty of sentimental condescension if he is seeking to posit Pearl as a life-enhancing antidote to the hermetic dilettantism of Renata, Joey and their mother. For all the warmth of Maureen Stapleton's performance, Pearl—exhorting her husband to stuff himself with food, professing a carefree disregard for visiting ancient monuments—is not too far removed from the stereotype of the overwhelming Jewish Momma. And this sentimentality seems to find reflection in the melodramatic apparatus of Eve's eventual *Star is Born*-style suicide by drowning and Pearl's resuscitation of Joey after the latter has waded into the surf to try to save her mother.

Interestingly enough, the themes adumbrated around Pearl are more succinctly developed in the treatment of Flyn, who—patronised overtly by her odious brother-in-law and implicitly by her sisters—proves not only to be more genuine in relating to them but also possesses, judging from her remarks about her career, a more practical and unresentful capacity for ironic self-awareness. This is one of the incidental felicities in *Interiors*. And, as well as the pleasure afforded by Gordon Willis' glowing images, there is in the film—however much it must be accounted a failure—a modesty and a refusal of the fashionable that leave scope for optimism about Allen's future in serious as well as comic movies. One must only hope that in future forays he will not, so to speak, wear a straight face so patently on his sleeve.

TIM PULLEINE

The All-Round Reduced Personality

The All-Round Reduced Personality (The Other Cinema) is the first fiction feature by the German film-maker Helke Sander, who has established a reputation over the last decade as a maker of political documentary shorts. Given this record, and Sander's continued involvement in the German women's movement and in other political campaigns, the film (*Redupers* for short) is less overtly propagandist than one might expect. It loses nothing thereby, becoming a subtler work that is finally more telling as it details the more insidious but less self-evident difficulties that a woman may face in running her own life.

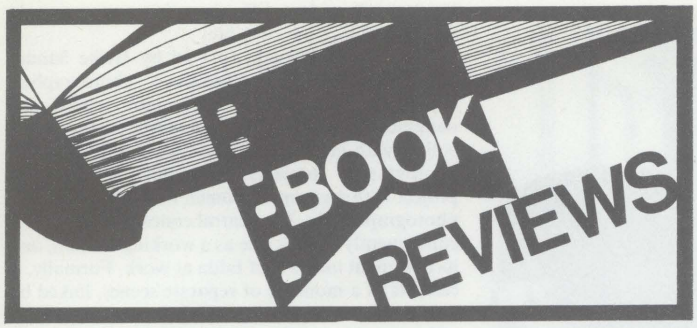
Edda Chiemnyjewski (played by Helke Sander herself) works as a freelance photographer, supporting herself and her junior school age daughter Dorothea. The pressures of this work collide with her home life and with more personal photographic projects, including a collective project with a group of women to document Berlin photographically. The central concern of the film is consequently Edda's role as a working woman, and its dominant image is of Edda at work. Formally, it consists of a montage of separate scenes, linked by a voice-over commentary which gives a breakdown of her earnings and expenses, as well as stating her reactions to the situations in which she is shown. This voice-over adds a dimension by letting the film reveal its heroine's feelings without allowing its audience to indulge in emotional over-identification. (It may perhaps have been this aspect that prompted Nigel Andrews' irate description of *Redupers* as a 'sub-Godard tract of awful solemnity' and its central character as 'practically a one-woman Reign of Misery.')

The image of Edda at work is present even in most of the scenes showing her home life, as she processes prints or, rushing out to an assignment, exasperatedly unwraps her playfully clinging daughter from around her neck. These are ordinary, everyday events, and it is precisely here that the film's value lies: it puts reality back into the ordinary. To interest an audience in rape, in violence towards women, in women being driven to nervous breakdowns, is not difficult. But to distil recognisable truths from mundane incident demands cinematic sophistication and exceptional accuracy of observation. If looking for parallels, I would turn not to other fiction films but to documentary film-makers such as Fred Wiseman. The conventional distinction between 'fiction' and 'documentary' is in fact difficult to apply to *Redupers*, an acted film whose success lies in the strength of its relation to an objective reality.

Like Wiseman, Helke Sander makes use of understatement and irony. The Berlin project highlights a series of problems, as the women are forced into negotiations with potential publishers and the project's sponsors in order to carry on their work in the way they want. They are expected to confine themselves to 'women's issues' (the fine irony here is that the right to deal with women's issues has long been a major concern of the women's movement); magazine editors recognise feminism as a saleable commodity and the women within the governing parties who have supported the project are primarily concerned with it as 'a means of drawing attention to their own existence'. The contradictions implicit here are emphasised during a scene where an editor urges Edda to do 'something about women' while his secretary brings in coffee. The point would seem trite if more strongly stated, but it is the accumulation of such small detail that creates the texture of ironic observation. In fact, the editor's attitude was echoed in real life by a Berlin cinema owner who thought that *Redupers* was not a women's film at all. 'He'd been expecting it to have a certain content,' said Helke Sander. 'He thought that women's films were a genre, like Westerns or Bavarian costume drama.'

The cinema owner was wrong: *Redupers* is a fine analysis of a question important to the women's movement. The film's connection with Helke Sander's earlier work can be clearly seen on this level. She has said about one of her short films, *Eine Prämie für Irene*: 'It describes the situation at home as well as at work, and the conflicts which arise between the two. . . It is the first film to take up the discussion in the women's movement between the private and the public spheres.' *Redupers* is also an elegant film, presenting a relatively complex theme with lucidity and wit, and with very little that is superfluous. It is a useful corrective to what seems to be a growing fashion for glossy but soft-centred films about women, many of them directed by men.

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND



THE MAGIC WORLD OF ORSON WELLES

By James Naremore

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £9.75

What is the name of the *second* sledge in *Citizen Kane*? Whose is the house seen in the first image of *Ambersons*? In what context, in 1945, did Welles have occasion to compare Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and Fox's *Woodrow Wilson*? And in what context, at the age of 18, did he write: 'I wanted to scare people on a big scale . . . Not lousy movies. No, I mean artistically—a huge practical joke'?

James Naremore's *The Magic World of Orson Welles* answers these questions, and a few others one never thought of asking. Encouragingly, he is not simply pandering to the movie buff's passion for unconsidered and inconsiderable trifles, but revealing that it's possible to go on where most Wellesian researchers have stopped, and that the findings are still worth making. He has read the columns Welles contributed in 1945 to the *New York Post* (which paid a none too generous $42.50 a week) and is enlightening both about the worried Rooseveltian liberalism of Welles' political attitudes and about his support for Hollywood 'B' pictures—Manny Farber, it seems, did not get there first.

Naremore has unearthed the unpublished play *Bright Lucifer*, in which the line about 'scaring people on a big scale' (which might or might not suggest *The War of the Worlds*) is actually spoken by Jack, a burnt-out actor in horror films. He has also examined a script on which Welles was working at the same time as the abortive *Heart of Darkness* project. The script, which Naremore calls 'the Mexican melodrama', and which might well have been Welles' first film, has for its protagonist an amnesiac who for a while believes he is 'Mr. England', a sort of William Joyce broadcasting fascist propaganda to the U.S.A. from Mexico. He would, of course, have been played by Orson Welles.

Apart from its intrinsic interest, the virtue of such factual information, in what is basically a critical book, is that it inspires confidence in Naremore's method. He has really read the sources (his analysis of just where in *The Trial* Welles parts company with Kafka and of how Welles shifts the emphasis of the Parable of the Law is detailed yet concise); but he has also gone into the question of the kind of wide-angle lens (25 mm for most of *Kane*) used to distort perspective. The best chapter in the book is a lengthy general analysis of Wellesian style, in which Naremore most effectively takes on Bazin.

'Some of the deep focus shots in *Kane*,' he tells us, 'were made not by simple photography but by a literal montage, an overlaying of images in a complicated optical printing process which created the impression of a single shot.' For Naremore, 'forced depth of perspective . . . is the *sine qua non* of Welles' style . . . and the technique is effective precisely because it *lacks* verisimilitude.' Where Bazin saw depth of field as the agent for realism, Naremore sees it as the starting point for the all-important manipulation of perspective, which in turn accounts for much of the sheer dynamism of the imagery. As he says elsewhere, Welles 'will seldom do one thing on the screen when he can do three or four.'

The introduction to the book suggests that Welles' films represent 'a powerful blend of social satire and displaced sexual fantasy' and that the task for the critic is 'to identify the sexual politics behind his [Welles'] fantasies.' Perhaps fortunately, there isn't actually too much of this in the text itself, since when it does venture on psychoanalytic ground the results tend to seem, in Welles' own phrase, 'rather dollar-book Freud'. The 'sexual politics', in so far as this might be taken to cover Welles' none too sympathetic attitude to women, are not very deeply explored. Instead, Naremore works steadily and perceptively through the films, scoring most thoroughly, perhaps, not with the well-worked territory of *Kane* and *Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil* but with *The Trial* and *Chimes at Midnight* and especially *Mr. Arkadin*. His suggestion, which comes in connection with *Touch of Evil*, that 'Welles may be the only German expressionist who is also authentically attracted to Latin cultures, and who is able to appropriate their "feel" to his style,' rings a number of critical bells.

The untidiness of Welles' creative existence, the commercials and TV chat show appearances and the unfinished projects (he has been working on *The Other Side of the Wind* since 1970), often seems to jar on American critics, bringing out strong strains of previously unsuspected puritanism. Naremore has the magnanimity that has always appeared an essential ingredient for anyone who wants really to come to terms with Welles. It's a pity, however, that he and Oxford University Press, who should know better, have let a nicely produced and far from cheap book emerge with such a rash of printing errors and misspelt names. Robert Siodmak, Milton Rachmil, Harry Cohn and Elmyr de Hory are all misspelt, the last two repeatedly so. And from Oxford, we could do without the sort of error that turns the famous Dietrich line into 'it doesn't matter what you say about poeple'.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

ANDRE BAZIN

By Dudley Andrew

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £7.25

The conversion of an evolving, exploratory and localised theory into a relatively closed system that functions like a security blanket is a familiar academic process in posthumous studies of Freud and Marx. A comparable revision of the career of André Bazin has been under way for some time; and a paradoxical aspect of Dudley Andrew's well-researched biography is that it furthers this enterprise, at the same time that it sketches a volatile background which could arguably challenge it.

When the first volume of Bazin's criticism in English appeared over a decade ago, edited and translated by Hugh Gray, a valuable cautionary note was sounded by Annette Michelson in *Artforum*: 'By eliminating as much as possible of the topical and ideological, Mr. Gray has transformed Bazin into a liberal *Sorbonnard*, lecturing—with distinction, it is true—in the timeless vacuum of the amphitheatre.' Over the years, one has witnessed the balloon-like expansion of this timeless vacuum—an inevitable consequence, perhaps, of the institutional structures that have formed around the energetic, polemical writing of an inspired journalist whose own pedagogical efforts were expended in ciné-clubs, cafés, factories, editorial offices.

Andrew is attentive to some of the topical and ideological currents in Bazin's career. But his lengthy paraphrases of Bazinian theory—rather like those in his earlier book, *The Major Film Theories*—seem bent on embalming this legacy under a glass bell, often stripped of its particular journalistic insights. Much of Bazin's best writing depends on an oscillation between generalisation and localised observation; Andrew's usual procedure is to foreground the former and omit the latter. One is told that 'Bazin had always maintained that Hollywood of the sound era was analogous to late seventeenth century French letters in that its language and conventions were so tightly regulated and refined that even the most ordinary artist was able to attain elegance and a certain precision.' But Bazin's more aphoristic claim that if Hollywood was like the court of Versailles, *Gilda* was its *Phèdre*—cited elsewhere by Peter Wollen—is not included, presumably because this might endanger Bazin's *Sorbonnard* status.

An early warning signal occurs in the introduction: 'From Bazin's graveside that November 14 [in 1958], an important part of the French intelligentsia looked toward the 1960s and toward a world that was, if not more villainous than that of the 1940s and 1950s, at least more complicated.' The nostalgic notion of a simpler past is a corollary to the impulse that converts the progressive strain in Bazin's writing—a sense of struggle aimed towards the future—into a virtual bulwark against further progression.

The strongest parts of this biography are contextual and anecdotal. An admirable summary is given of Bazin's intellectual grounding in de Chardin, Malraux, Merleau-Ponty, Mounier, Sartre and others, and a few fascinating cameos of other film figures are included. (It is intriguing to discover that in 1943 Alain Resnais helped teach Bazin about the history of cinema—bicycling with his 9.5mm projector and prints of Lang and Keaton films to Bazin's ciné-club on rue des Ursulines.) Bazin's lifelong fondness for exotic pets, his generosity to friends and colleagues and his neglect of his own health (he was only forty when he died) are charted in detail. And a recent statement by Chris Marker passionately defends Bazin's political integrity against the charges of contemporary Stalinists and latter-day Leninists: 'He spent long hours in the factories these radicals write about from comfortable desks. Bazin was out there using his life to bring about a renewed culture. I wish he had been with us in the May of '68.'

It is an astonishing fact that out of all the academic material that has accumulated since Bazin's death twenty years ago, no bibliography of his articles has ever appeared in print. Andrew's book, concentrating almost exclusively on ambitious articles rather than individual reviews, perpetuates this problem by including no bibliography of any sort. Another curious absence is the lack of captions for the photographs included—most of which were usefully labelled when they first appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 91, a special issue published shortly after Bazin's death.

Paraphrases of the ideas of Bazin and others are occasionally clumsy or misleading. For instance, Bazin's memorable hypothesis of a Stroheim film 'composed of a single shot as long-lasting and as close-up as you like' becomes a muddled overview of cinema and the cosmos, whereby 'The deep relations and correspondences within the universe are put under pressure in cinema because we are afforded a look "as long-lasting and as close-up as you like."' Within such terms, it's small wonder that Stroheim himself doesn't even warrant a look-in. An interesting account of the debate stirred up by Bazin's 'The Myth of Stalin in the Soviet Cinema'—one of the few untranslated essays discussed in any depth—ends with the observation that 'it would only be a short while before Marxist sympathisers like Roland Barthes would begin playing freely with precisely the myth of Stalin.' Whatever Andrew means by 'precisely', the footnoted Barthes article in question—'La Crosière du *Batory*' in *Mythologies*—contains not a single reference to Stalin.

None of these blemishes are fatal; but an overall impression of a

striving for hagiography inevitably limits the value of Andrew's study. The overweening piety of certain passages brings the book uncomfortably close at times to the necrophiliac *hommages* paid by Truffaut in *La Chambre Verte*—in some respects, the director's latest version of *la politique des auteurs*, which inadvertently implies that the only worthy art (or criticism) today belongs in the mausoleum.

However dated some of Bazin's notions about realism may seem in the light of subsequent developments, there is little doubt that he provides in his best writing a model of the critical method. The adventure of his thought—stimulated by a richer philosophical tradition than most film critics have been conversant with, informed by an extraordinary ethical imagination, and frequently supported and refined by scrupulous reasoning—remains provocative and seminal. What still seems needed today, however, if this legacy is to remain useful, is a closer understanding of Bazin's journalistic virtues—and a more daring application and extension of his ideas than this academic biography will allow.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

THE GRAVES OF ACADEME: AMERICAN THESIS WRITING

Time was—not even so long ago—when writing on film was free from taint of academicism. When I first went over to teach in the University of Southern California in 1972 it was as part of the newly set up film studies section; degrees had been given in practical film-making since the early 30s (and very touchy they were about any suggestion this made the division merely a trade school; what, they wanted to know, about law and dentistry?) but an academic degree in film studies as a branch of the Humanities was a new thing at USC. It was time, and more than time; similar courses had been going at NYU and elsewhere for several years, and students in their thousands were asking for nothing better than to plunge into Eisenstein and Bergman and W. C. Fields, and get an academic credit for it. For several years in the early 70s, Film Studies was the fastest growing area in American academic life.

What do all these students do, once past the preliminaries? But, of course: they take degrees. And what is the principal, approved part of taking your second and third degrees, usually M.A. and Ph.D.? To write up your researches in the form of a thesis (a term mainly reserved in the U.S. for M.A. work) or a dissertation. And having put all that work into writing, it would seem wanton not to try for that much desired next step, publication. Though the vast majority of theses languish for ever in xerox and microfilm on the shelves of university libraries, it is still amazing, and rather alarming, how many of them do achieve, sort of, the dignity of print. (The 'sort of' is a necessary qualification, since a lot of them come out of small presses, like the disarmingly named Scarecrow Press of Metuchen, New Jersey, which print in that sort of smudgy, typographically unjustified fashion one step up from a good xeroxed typescript.)

Now whether you can serve both God and Mammon, it is considerably more difficult to serve both normal readability and the special requirements of the American academic machine. To begin with, we have the intolerable conventions of form in academic writing, which insist that first you shall explain at prosy length what you are shaping up to say, then say it, and then demonstrate in lengthy summary that you have said it. Possibly this enables lazy academics to assess the work entirely on the strength of its conclusion, but I do not think so: it seems to be part and parcel of the heavy legacy German academic practice has laid on America. Along with it comes an amazingly widespread insistence that every thesis should go back to the Greeks. I recall one thesis I was on the committee of which concerned itself with 'Theatrical Fantasy Elements in the Work of Tod Browning'; and, on the instructions of the committee chairman, its author got us to page 185 before we had even reached *grand guignol*, the point at which I would have imagined any sane consideration of the subject should start, rather than with the *Bacchae*. And, worst of all, comes the style.

That dreadful American academic style which sounds as though it has been translated rather badly from German. Largely because many of the classics of American academic literature actually were, or were laboriously written in English by people thinking in German. Faced with some kind of academic task, far more American students base themselves stylistically on Kracauer, alas, than ever do on Arthur Knight. It seems to happen by some osmotic process, for though I know many teachers and pupils who have Kracauer's great, idiotic theoretical work on their shelves, I do not know one who seriously claims to have read it all through. Be that as it may, the style of most American academic books is plodding at best, cloaking what often turn out to be remarkably simple thoughts in very hefty polysyllabic formulations.

A fair example is *Authorship and Narrative in the Cinema*, by William Luhr and Peter Lehman (Putnam, $4.95). This proves, on inspection, to be a rather improbable forced marriage of two dissertations, one on Ford and auteurship, the other on cinematic narrative and the various versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The authors solemnly tick off auteurist criticism ('Without in any way undercutting its massive and essential contribution, it must be seen that it ignores areas essential to a rigorous approach to film') and plough heavily through Ford, Mamoulian *et al.*, pointing out with great weight and emphasis things which should be obvious to any child and shamelessly skirting the more difficult bits.

A lot of such writing seems, indeed, in so far as it has any purpose other than to bring the pile of pages up to a respectable minimum, to be designed as cribs for pretentious 15-

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It tends to come as a relief when the books' purpose as study-guides is plain to see, or at least when the research is not wrapped up in painful prose. One can in all honesty, for example, say that the first four of G. K. Hall's Reference Publications in Film should be very useful to further researchers. They are annotated bibliographies and/or filmographies of, respectively, Buster Keaton by George Wead and George Lellis ($15), Robbe-Grillet by William van Wert ($18), and Billy Wilder by Steve Seidman ($15), along with a Union Catalogue of manuscript and special collections on *Motion Pictures, Television and Radio* in the Western United States by Linda Harris Mehr ($27). Obviously a lot of hard work compiling and collating has gone into them, and they do not pretend to be more than working tools—though you would not believe that plot summaries of Wilder and Keaton films could be quite so heavy going.

I must admit to a possible *parti pris* in a couple of cases. I was on the thesis committee of what I consider the most readable and enlightening book of this kind, Charles Derry's *Dark Dreams: The Horror Film from Psycho to Jaws* (Yoseloff/Tantivy, £8.50)—but then I was also on the committee of one of the most turgid and humourless, Brent Maddock's *The Films of Jacques Tati* (Scarecrow, $7). And I did while away many hours of childhood in fleapits with the author of the other book, *Movies as Social Criticism* (Scarecrow, $10) by I. C. Jarvie (whom Virginia Mayo hath joined together, can any man put asunder?). Nevertheless, Derry does write clearly and sharply, not at excessive length, about the various strains of horror in the 60s and 70s, which he distinguishes as horror of personality, horror of Armageddon and horror of the demonic—a neat but not too rigid formulation. And Professor Jarvie lays about him in all directions, making a lot of sense in even his most wilfully provocative statements on the role of movies in society and vice versa. Maybe it helps that he is British domiciled in Canada. Maybe it helps that he actually has something he is burning to say, which, in a world of making up the requisite length and obligatory publication, comes like a breath of fresh air. The leaves in that grove could do with an airing.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Letters

Michael Powell

SIR,—It is a pity that the first article on Michael Powell to be published in SIGHT AND SOUND should be so evasive in its acknowledgment of the critical sources from which much of the argument (and, indeed, quotation) is derived.

In 'Michael Powell: Myths and Supermen', John Russell Taylor makes reference to an interview between Powell and Kevin Gough-Yates of 1971. No interview of this date exists and it would seem from the extended quotation that he means the interview of 1970 which was published by the BFI to accompany the NFT retrospective of Powell's work. The source of Taylor's other quotations is not even mentioned and Taylor, in putting forward his ideas, acknowledges no indebtedness to the ideas expressed in print before him by other authors. Many of his observations are based on an article and interview which Kevin Gough-Yates wrote and made for the second retrospective of Powell's work at the Royal Film Archive of Belgium, which were published in 1973. Nowhere, however, does Taylor mention this Brussels booklet. Similarly, his comments on the daemonic aspects of Powell's work are derived from Raymond Durgnat's *Mirror for England.*

Important elements in Taylor's article which have their origins, albeit unacknowledged, in Kevin Gough-Yates' Brussels article and interview are as follows:

The fairy tale element Taylor 'discovers' in Powell's work was plainly indicated by Gough-Yates: 'By . . . *The Phantom Light,* the teller of fairy tales begins to emerge as a personality. The opening sequence has much in common with *I Know Where I'm Going,* made ten years later and consciously constructed as a fairy story with its dreams and wishes, its princes and witches . . .' Taylor links three films in a single paragraph—*The Red Shoes, I Know Where I'm Going* and *The Phantom Light.* Oddly enough, so did Gough-Yates. Gough-Yates wrote of a 'dreamlike Wonderland' and 'witch-like figures'; Taylor writes of 'an other worldly atmosphere' and 'tales of ghosts'.

Taylor's reference to the Disneyish technology of *Black Narcissus* seems to have its origins in the same source, but more important is another give-away passage in which Taylor pursues the characters who 'regularly stand in for the director as *meneur du jeu* and therefore represent Powell the artist.' 'It is barely conceivable,' he writes, 'there could be no sort of

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identification in his own mind between himself and the impresario Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*.' In putting forward this view, Taylor is hardly chancing his arm as a quick look at the Brussels booklet establishes. 'KG-Y: To what extent are these Godlike figures like the director of the film? The point I make is that these figures, like Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*, express attitudes that are not too different from your own.' After some discussion about the Leslie Howard figure in *49th Parallel*, Powell responds: 'Yes, I agree that it is like me talking'; of his own appearance in the films, he says: 'I think it was only important in *Peeping Tom* where I'm clearly the director and visual maniac.'

It seems that it is not just films that beget films, for as Taylor points out, Livesey, in *Life and Death* as 'master of the camera obscura' is able to 'play God' and he quotes Powell as saying that it 'makes Livesey seem more like God'. The source of this quotation is the Brussels booklet of 1973 which he nowhere mentions.

The points that Taylor makes here are all in that article and interview. He finds *A Matter of Life and Death* harking forward to *Peeping Tom*; Gough-Yates describes the same similarities. Taylor simply picks up this theme which Gough-Yates pursued earlier.

When Taylor refers to *Colonel Blimp* he quotes Clive Candy as saying: 'It's like the Indian rope trick: first you want to see it, and then you see it.' Like so much of this article, this is taken, albeit with different punctuation, from Kevin Gough-Yates. He used just this line in interviewing Emeric Pressburger in 1970. How do I know that Taylor is cribbing? Easy! A line like it exists in the film, but not that line. Gough-Yates, like Candy himself, must have wanted to hear it and then heard it.

How unfortunate that a writer as good as John Russell Taylor should be so intent on covering his tracks in this article.

Yours faithfully,
MARGARET TARRATT

London, N.W.6.

I am surprised that my harmless introductory article on Powell has roused such passionate response in Miss Tarratt. I did not suppose I was 'discovering' anything or making stunningly original points: the fairy-tale and daemonic elements, for example, are surely so obvious that it is not surprising they crop up in the stock of ideas on Powell common to those who have given him any thought—which seems to mean in practice Raymond Durgnat, Kevin Gough-Yates, Ian Christie and myself. Certainly I have found very useful Mr. Gough-Yates' two interviews with Powell (and Miss Tarratt is right, I should have explicitly mentioned the Brussels one as well); though I hardly see that acknowledged quotations from the film-maker himself constitute 'cribbing'. As to the sinister 'covering of tracks' by quoting from a 1971 interview which does not exist: the only date on the BFI booklet is January 10 1971, the date of the John Player Lecture it was published to coincide with.

Finally, before we get too involved in the comparing of dates and establishing of priorities, I should perhaps mention that some of the material in my article (including the 'misquotation' from *Colonel Blimp*) comes from the stock for what proved eventually to be an abortive book on Powell for the *Cinema One* series, which I was working on throughout 1970, during which time I was screening all the available Archive prints of Powell's films, many of them in the company of Mr. Gough-Yates. We tended, as enthusiasts will, to discuss our responses and associations freely.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Paul Fejös

SIR,—I am a trifle surprised by the reference in Graham Petrie's article 'Fejös' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1978) to 'that turbulent Hungary of 1920–21 which also spawned the careers of Michael Curtiz and Alexander Korda . . .' The turbulence was mostly over: Admiral Horthy had been installed as Regent since March 1 1920. The Republic of Councils had collapsed in the preceding year along with the cinema organisation in which Korda and Curtiz had played important roles. Both directors had left Hungary permanently in 1919. Curtiz had been directing films since 1912 and Korda since 1914; so that by the time Fejös began his career they were, in terms of that period, already veterans.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID ROBINSON

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Film Guide

****AUTUMN SONATA** (*ITC*)
Ingrid united at last with Ingmar Bergman—plus Liv Ullmann as a choked-up child-wife—strikes many sparks, even though these characters lacerating each other with recriminations about the past are not exactly strangers. Some extraordinary, intimate playing between the two women; lovely, if static, compositions, but it would be nice if Bergman could now make *The Merry Widow*. (Lena Nyman.) *Reviewed.*

***BEHIND CONVENT WALLS** (*New Realm*)
A Stendhal story provides Borowczyk with the starting point for an appealingly bizarre concoction of anti-clerical low-jinks and hieratic melodrama, wrapped up in some fetchingly sumptuous images. Unfortunately, frenzy finally wins the day. (Ligia Branice, Gabriella Giaccobe.)

***BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOR** (*United Artists*)
Intermittently engaging French satire on the folly of war and the vanity of colonialism. Set in West Africa during the First World War, this promising debut is enhanced by some jaunty playing and Claude Agostini's handsome photography. (Jean Carmet, Jacques Dufilho, Jacques Spiesser; director, Jean-Jacques Annaud.)

***BLUE COLLAR** (*CIC*)
A thriller about union corruption, which makes explicit political capital out of its Detroit car factory setting: the fostering of racial tensions, the collusion of union and management, etc. But the plot eventually runs counter to the politics, and Paul Schrader scrambles the social reality of his blue collar heroes. (Harvey Keitel, Richard Pryor, Yaphet Kotto.) *Reviewed.*

CARRY ON EMMANNUELLE (*Hemdale*)
With vigour undiminished, the troupers rehearse the old gags in the 30th film in this artless, ineffably British series. Kenneth Williams, the French ambassador to London, vainly pumps iron while his wife Suzanne Danielle scours the city for sexual prey. (Kenneth Connor, Joan Sims, Peter Butterworth; director, Gerald Thomas.)

****CYCLE, THE** (*Contemporary*)
Hard-hitting study (banned for several years in Iran) of how a cycle of corruption overtakes a country youth caught up in the blood-bank black market in Tehran. Unlike his earlier Fellini-esque poses, this film shows Daryush Mehrjui to be master of a harsh narrative style, greatly aided by Hochang Baharlou's superb colour photography. (Ezat Entezami, Ali Nassiriane.)

****DAMIEN OMEN II** (*Fox*)
In which we see the Anti-Christ of *The Omen* grown to puberty: a surprisingly effective and appropriately large-scale, objective assessment of how the Devil might be at home in a sphere (a military academy; the empire of a powerful industrialist) where his power complex has more secular and human overtones than is usual in the hobgoblin genre. (William Holden, Lee Grant, Jonathan Scott-Taylor; director, Don Taylor.)

DAMNATION ALLEY (*Rank*)
Tatty epic about survival after the nuclear holocaust. A travesty of Roger Zelazny's novel, with script and special effects proving to be bigger disasters than any dreamt of in science fiction. (George Peppard, Jan-Michael Vincent, Dominique Sanda; director, Jack Smight.)

***DOG SOLDIERS** (*United Artists*)
After a promising pyrotechnic start, Karel Reisz' adaptation of the novel by Robert Stone about the atomising effects of Vietnam on a number of individual Americans goes wildly out of control down the by-ways of chase movie conventions. (Michael Moriarty, Nick Nolte, Tuesday Weld.) *Reviewed.*

DRIVER, THE (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Walter Hill's second feature as director confirms one's worst fears about his first, *The Streetfighter*. A grab-bag of European pretensions about the thriller—cityscapes reduced to a dark, expressionist wasteland, cops and robbers to existential entities—is rehashed and leavened with extended car chases and dollops of psychology. (Ryan O'Neal, Bruce Dern, Isabelle Adjani.)

EYES OF LAURA MARS (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
In a canny and fairly typical move, *Laura Mars* manages both to look askance at sex-and-violence (in the work of its photographer heroine) and to mould itself in much the same terms. Its major premise—Laura can 'see' through the eyes of a psychopathic killer—is unworthy of scriptwriter John (*Dark Star, Precinct 13*) Carpenter. (Faye Dunaway, Tommy Lee Jones; director, Irvin Kershner.)

FM (*CIC*)
Several excellent players (notably TV's Martin Mull) are largely wasted in this spongy fantasy about the tribulations of a 'creative' Los Angeles FM radio station. The latter-day hippies who staff the station seem almost as tiresomely dated as the 50s teenagers in *Grease*. (Michael Brandon, Eileen Brennan, Cleavon Little; director, John A. Alonzo.)

***FOUL PLAY** (*CIC*)
Goldie Hawn is the agreeably spunky heroine of this rather too whimsical suspense comedy about a plot to assassinate the Pope; Chevy Chase, in his film debut, blandly supports as a laid-back San Francisco detective. Red herrings and some embarrassing running gags do not entirely spoil the fun. (Burgess Meredith, Rachel Roberts; director, Colin Higgins.)

****GERMANY IN AUTUMN** (*Scala*)
Palpably anguished and uncertain reactions from West Germany's leading directors to the violence in their homeland during the summer and autumn of 1977. A political testament revealing many of the contradictions of life in the Federal Republic. (Directors: Alf Brustellin, Bernhard Sinkel, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, Katja Rupé, Hans Peter Cloos, Maximiliane Mainka, Peter Schubert, Volker Schlöndorff.)

GREEK TYCOON, THE (*CIC*)
All the scenery, props and blandly malleable stars are here for a proper gossip-column romp through the life and loves of you-know-who. But the makers have trodden so cautiously round their subject that the result is not merely empty and predictably fatuous but a curiously ascetic and obscure soap opera. (Jacqueline Bisset, Anthony Quinn, James Franciscus; director, J. Lee Thompson.)

HEAVEN CAN WAIT (*CIC*)
A remake of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, a piece of 40s whimsy about a snarl-up in the divine bureaucracy whose period cuteness resolutely shines through this patchy up-date. Co-authored (by Warren Beatty and Elaine May) and co-directed (by Beatty and Buck Henry), it also reflects poor committee work on earth. (Warren Beatty, Julie Christie, James Mason.)

HILLS HAVE EYES, THE (*New Realm*)
Exploitation hits rock bottom with this tacky *Petty Guignol* about a cannibal family attempting to pick off a charmless group of stranded campers. Plenty of pathological detail, little mystery, no imagination. (John Steadman, Janus Blythe; director, Wes Craven.)

****HOOPER** (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
Unadventurous but entirely delightful tribute to the art of the stuntman, brightly scripted, full of doggy good humour (Burt Reynolds at his very best), and offering a nice line in movie jokes. (Jan-Michael Vincent, Brian Keith, Sally Field; director, Hal Needham.)

***INTERIORS** (*United Artists*)
Woody Allen's studied essay on the ties that bind a neurotic (but non-Jewish) American family is fastidiously crafted but at times almost ludicrously tendentious. The players, notably E. G. Marshall and Maureen Stapleton, are excellent, though one wonders at times if they are in the right film. (Diane Keaton, Marybeth Hurt, Kristin Griffith.) *Reviewed.*

***IT LIVES AGAIN** (*Columbia-EMI-Warner*)
The murderous mutant babies ride again in this sequel to *It's Alive*, quite effectively though to familiar intent. Outstanding performances (John Ryan, Kathleen Lloyd, Frederic Forrest) give the film a dignity rare enough in the genre. (Eddie Constantine; director, Larry Cohen.)

JAWS 2 (*CIC*)
The producers of *Jaws* give their own bandwagon a downhill shove with a nominal sequel that looks more like a remake—minus Spielberg's precision. The plot is wholly predictable, the injection of a shrill crowd of teenagers notably tiresome. (Roy Scheider, Lorraine Gary, Murray Hamilton; director, Jeannot Szwarc.)

****LUDWIG** (*Premier/Supreme*)
Cuts of 45 minutes radically alter the structure of Visconti's grandiose fresco dedicated to the Mad King, Wagner, Germany, homosexual youth, etc. The English dubbing also wreaks havoc, but the upholstery is as lavish as ever and Visconti works up to a pictorially stunning evocation of Ludwig's last days, his arrest and death. (Helmut Berger, Romy Schneider, Trevor Howard.)

****MAD DOG** (*Trident-Barber*)
Stunning performance by Dennis Hopper as the legendary Australian outlaw Daniel Morgan. A strange and extremely striking film, part Western and part poetic fantasy, about man's inhumanity to man. (David Gulpilil, Frank Thring; director, Philippe Mora.)

MAGIC (*Fox*)
Revival of the *Dead of Night* chestnut, involving a mad ventriloquist and his murderous manikin. A four-handed chamber piece which marks a distinct change of style for director Richard Attenborough, but his plodding approach fails to make William Goldman's slick contrivance any more real (or suspenseful). (Anthony Hopkins, Ann-Margret, Burgess Meredith.)

****NEWSFRONT** (*Mainline*)
Incisive portrait of Australia in the decade after the war, as seen through the camera lenses and the personnel of two rival newsreel companies forced into uneasy amalgamation by the threat of television. Phillip Noyce integrates the real and the reconstructed with technical flair and impressive narrative assurance. (Bill Hunter, Wendy Hughes, Chris Haywood.)

OUTRAGEOUS (*Miracle*)
Craig Russell's remarkable talent as an impersonator of female stars fails to disguise the shortcomings of this thinly sentimental tale of a homosexual hairdresser who leaves his native Ontario for the big time in New York. (Hollis McLaren; director, Richard Benner.)

POWER PLAY (*Rank*)
Everyday story of modern power politics in which ingenuous army officers, smarting under a nameless dictatorship, give up frying pan for fire by perpetrating a *coup d'état*. Tired casting, nudging cynicism and a tendentious plot conspire with the questionable notion that the armed forces are the proper guardians of democracy. (Peter O'Toole, David Hemmings, Donald Pleasence; director, Martyn Burke.)

****RAGGEDY ANN & ANDY** (*Fox*)
Nothing ragged about the animation in this delightful version of an American children's classic. The veteran Hollywood artists assembled by Richard Williams perform intricate wonders with the toy characters who venture outside their playroom for some fantastic escapades. Cute whimsy only threatens in the songs.

****RENALDO & CLARA** (*Artificial Eye*)
Bob Dylan's epic testament to the Rock movement of the 60s and 70s is anecdotal and discursive, elliptical and metaphorical: a Magical Mystery Tour that complements and expands on *The Last Waltz* with autobiographical skits, fantasies, comedy and superbly staged numbers from the Rolling Thunder Revue. At nearly four hours, a surprisingly compact view of its life and times. (Joan Baez, Sara Dylan, Ronee Blakley, Ronnie Hawkins.)

SECOND CHANCE (*United Artists*)
Compared with epic affairs like *Another Man, Another Woman*, this is throwaway Lelouch and the limpest piffle imaginable, barely redeemed by its eccentricity. Sixteen years a jailbird, Catherine Deneuve gets her second chance at a life of bliss, let out into a world running rife with coincidence and *haute couture*. (Anouk Aimée, Charles Denner, Francis Huster.)

***STEVIE** (*Enterprise*)
Stage-bound transposition of Hugh Whitemore's play about the life of Stevie Smith, notable for Glenda Jackson's spiky, immaculately spoken rendering of the poet of Palmers Green. The real triumph is Mona Washbourne, splendidly, humorously leonine as her unlettered 'Lion Aunt'. (Trevor Howard, Alec McCowen; director, Robert Enders.)

****SUMMER PARADISE** (*Contemporary*)
Produced by Bergman, directed by Gunnel Lindblom, novelistically dense in its exploration of cannibalistic family relationships, curiously moving despite a tendency to message-making, this might almost be a lost early Bergman film. (Birgitta Valberg, Sif Ruud, Agneta Ekmanner.)

****THIRTY-NINE STEPS, THE** (*Rank*)
Don Sharp's handsomely mounted period adaptation of Buchan, briskly plotted and featuring the best Hitchcock pastiche to date with a climactic sequence on Big Ben. Some unsatisfactory casting lets it down, and direct references to Hitchcock's original come off less well than the newer inventions. (Robert Powell, David Warner, John Mills.)

****WEDDING, A** (*Fox*)
Robert Altman's sprawling black comedy probe into the ritual of marriage American-style, teetering into farce as a wedding reception disintegrates under the weight of the guests' public display and private secrets. Uneven and unsteady, in the Altman ensemble manner, though there are some cherishable moments at the edges. (Carol Burnett, Paul Dooley, Vittorio Gassman, Geraldine Chaplin.) *Reviewed.*

****WOMAN OF PARIS, A** (*Cinegate*)
Chaplin's lost 'drama' proves itself vibrantly alive, and full of nicely controlled humorous touches. Edna Purviance goes to Paris after a misunderstanding with her fiancé and falls under the spell of lizard-like millionaire Adolphe Menjou. A wonderful blend of sentimentality and behavioural detail. (Nelly Bly Baker, Henry Bergman.)

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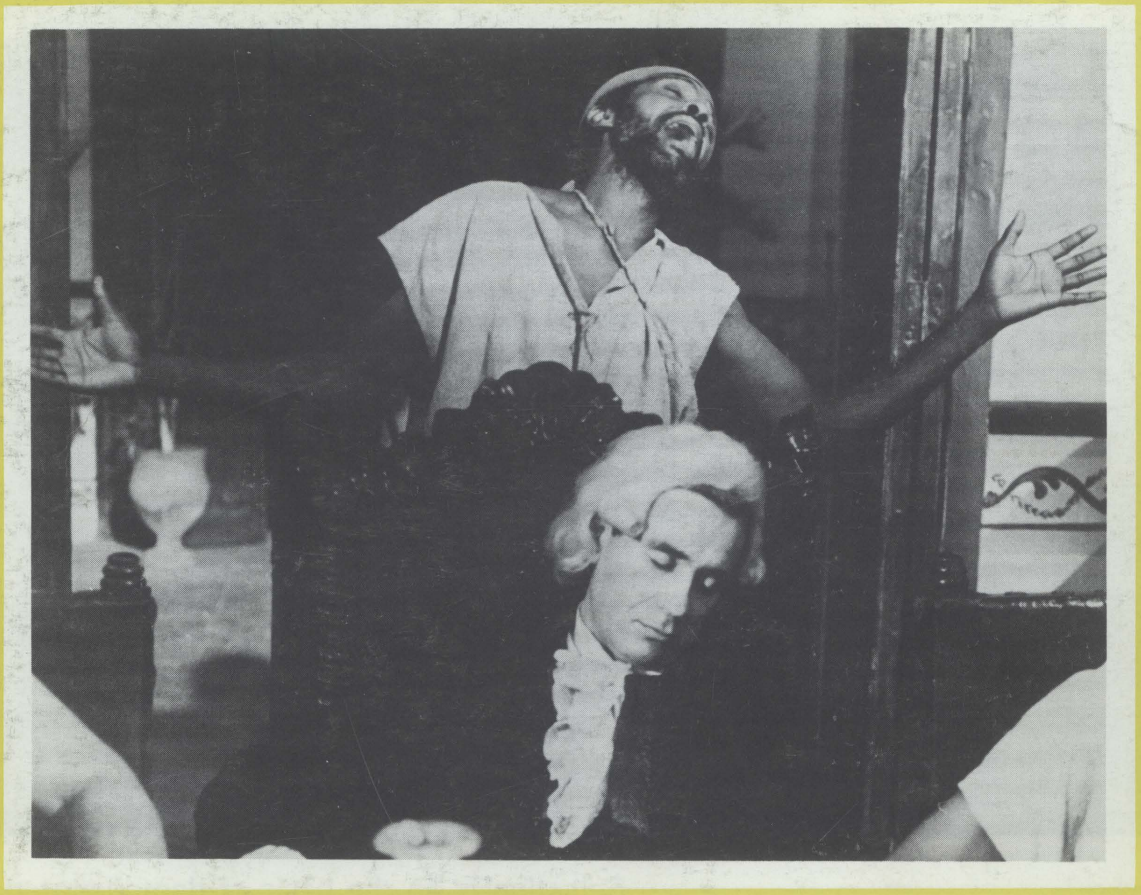

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